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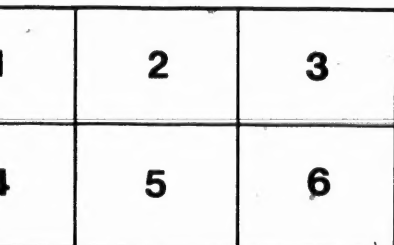
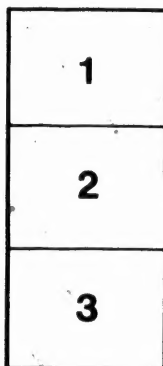
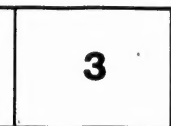
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A NOVEL

BY MAY AGNES FLEMING

AUTHOR OF "GUY EARLSCOURT'S WIFE," "A WONDERFUL WOMAN,"
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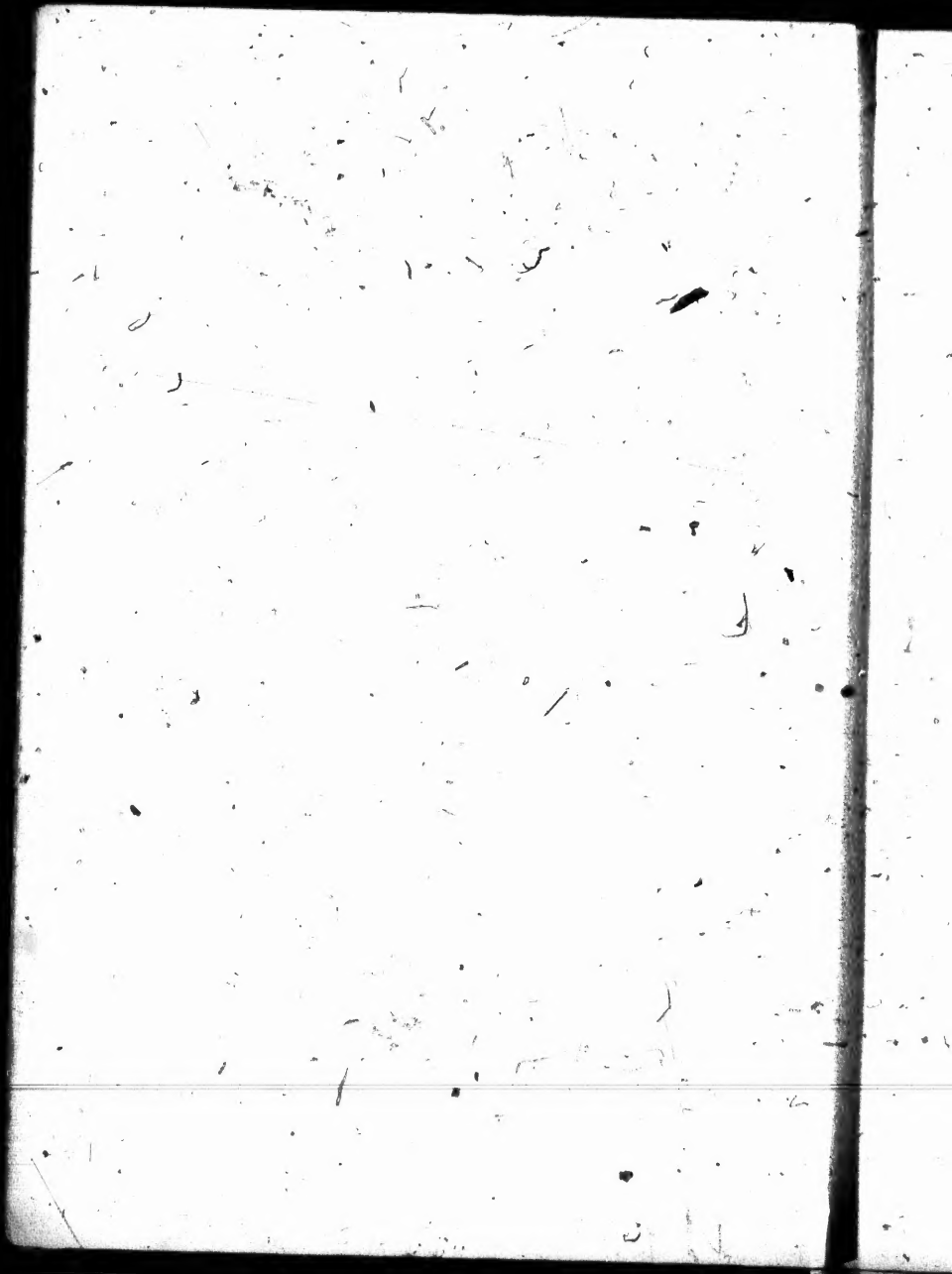
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THE SISTERS OF TORWOOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE MISTRESS OF TORWOOD.

A LONELY old house, standing by itself in a green hollow, shut in on the three sides by the sloping hills of Maryland, and on the front a winding path, leading down through a long avenue of pines to the ceaseless sea. A dingy old house, built of red brick, whose redness had long ago departed, leaving it black and dismal to look at—an old place, indeed, looking as old as the hills themselves almost, but strong and sturdy, and hale and upright through it all. True, the attics leaked, and the cellars were moldering, and the chimneys leaned like the Tower of Pisa, but the wall would have borne cannonading and not minded it in the least, and the doors, of massive oak, and studded with huge nails of iron and brass, would have defied a battering-ram. A quaint old place, with peaked gables, high narrow windows, with diamond panes set in leaden casements, and two square towers at either end, giving it the look of a broken down church retired into private life.

It was from this last it took its name—Torwood Towers—and there had been a time when banners floated from them in the breeze, announcing to the

country round when the lords of the manor were at home. But that time had passed away; there was no lord to reign at Torwood Towers now, not even an heir, but a jointured widow and four blooming heiresses.

Never before had Torwood been without an heir, but though the late Judge Torwood had been married three times, no son came to reign when he should have passed away. One daughter, Miss Lucy Torwood, followed his first marriage; three daughters, Mesdemoiselles Edith, Florence, and Margaret followed his second; and none at all his third. He had wedded first, for money, a Maryland heiress, ugly as a Hottentot, and with the purse of Fortunatus; he had wedded next for love a beautiful Creole, whom he met in Cuba; and he had married the last time for—he could hardly have told himself for what. Not for money—he had enough of that, and the lady had none; not for love—at sixty-five gentlemen take to gout and rheumatism oftener than to the *grande passion*; not for a housekeeper—Miss Lucy Torwood was twenty years old and an excellent manager. But in Washington he had met Mrs. Stuart, a handsome and well-preserved widow at five-and-forty, and without very well seeing any reason for it, he proposed, was accepted, and married.

Widows of forty-five are not to be trifled with. Mrs. Stuart clinched the bargain at once, and though her son, a tall young man of five-and-twenty, who with M. D. after his name, supported his mother in very good style, looked grave and a little annoyed, she became Mrs. Torwood the third week after the offer.

Judge Torwood had a way of burying his wives, but widows with grown up sons are apt to be tough, and the third Mrs. Torwood buried him three years after she married him.

It was in Italy the sad event took place; they had lived there ever since the marriage, for Judge Torwood's health, and Mrs. Torwood's pleasure, leaving only the eldest and the youngest Miss Torwood at home to look after the old place, for Miss Edith was in Cuba with her dead mamma's friends, and Miss Florence was in a fashionable boarding-school in New York. And that perhaps, was the reason why such a general air of neglect and desolation reigned about Torwood Towers, why the broad fields that spread away around it, lay waste and uncultivated, why the fences were broken, the outhouses decaying, the roof leaking, the orchard, shrubbery, and flower-garden running wild, the swallows building their nests undisturbed in the eaves and sloping chimneys, the dogs and little negroes dozing lazily all day in the sunshine in the paved courtyard in front of the house, the gates hanging from their hinges, and grass growing tall and rank in the graveled footpath leading down to the sea. For though Miss Torwood was an excellent manager, she was only a young lady of three-and-twenty, too gentle to rule a tribe of lazy, shiftless servants, and a place so vast as Torwood Towers required the able head and strong hand of a man.

In Torwoodtown, a bustling, self-important little place, half-fishing village half-city, Miss Torwood was very little known, except to the tradespeople whose business brought them to the Hall; while

Miss Margaret, better known as Miss Madge, was a celebrated character, known to all, high and low.

The aristocracy in and around Torwoodtown called sometimes on the solitary young lady in the great lonely mansion; but as Miss Torwood was not fond of society, these friendly visits were rarely returned, and the aristocracy became offended, and discontinued them. So Miss Lucy became known after a time as the Recluse of Torwood, and was rarely seen except on Sunday at the little Scotch kirk in the town, for she was a strict follower of John Knox and her Scotch ancestors, and never failed, rain or shine, to appear every Sabbath morning and afternoon in the square, high-backed pew under the pulpit. "There the young men stared at the pretty, quiet face, bending over her hymn-book, but none of them got farther than lifting their hats, for Miss Lucy had a quiet dignity about her, that said in very large print, "Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther."

The gossips whispered that Mr. Alexander McPherson, the tall young man in the white neckcloth, who propounded the Word to the kirk-goers of Torwoodtown, and whose hair was sandy, whose face was freckled, and who spoke through his nose, never was so eloquent as when Lucy Torwood's fair face looked up at him, banging the pulpit, and that his shambling pony took him down the bridle-path leading over the hill from the town to the Hall rather oftener than there seemed any real necessity for.

But nobody knew exactly how this was, and Miss Lucy, taking care of her somewhat self-willed younger sister Madge, a sprightly damsel of six

teen, and attending to her housekeeping, and reading and sewing at home, cared very little what anybody said, and went serenely on in the even tenor of her way. Being so unobtrusive a character, it was nothing strange that Torwoodtown should, after a while, forget almost that there was such a place in existence as the Towers, or such a young lady as Miss Torwood reigning there in solitary state, when an event occurred that brought both facts suddenly and vividly back to their memory.

The event was the unexpected arrival of Madame Torwood, from Italy, clad in the deepest and richest habiliments of woe and widowhood, and bringing with her about two dozen trunks, and an equal number of bandboxes, and a spruce French maid, who wore long golden drops, silk aprons with cunning little pockets, in which her hands were always stuck, and who looked in splendid disdain out of her black eyes on Torwoodtown and everybody in it.

It was a warm June evening when the widow came, and a warmer day succeeded. From early morning the sun had throbbed like a heart of fire in the purplish sky, and at its setting was burning out in scarlet splendor. The sea, clothed with sails, reflected the red glory of the dying day in its mirror-like surface, and the long lazy swells broke one after another with a gentle wash on the white sand. Torwood Towers lay still and lifeless as the Castle of the Sleeping Beauty; the dogs dozing on the flagstones, and the naked little negroes rolling over in the warm sand, the only living things to be seen.

Lower and lower the red sun sank, dipped behind

the glowing horizon, and was gone. The evening star and a pale young crescent moon rose up in its stead, a delicious breeze floated from the sea, and then a door, opening on the piazza running around the second story, opened, and a lady came out, and began walking slowly up and down, up and down, and watching the white sails flitting over the waveless waters.

A lady, tall of figure, stately of mien, and haughty of carriage; a lady who had been young and handsome thirty years before, but whose dark hair was threaded with silver now; whose brunette complexion had faded to sallow; whose chin was double, and ran into a throat unbending and stiff as a pillar; whose mouth was hard and unsmiling; whose step told a tale of iron resolution, and whose eye was like a hawk's—a lady dressed in black from head to foot, and looking in her sables and crape like a dowager duchess, a lady, in short, who deposed Miss Lucy, and was the new Mistress of Torwood.

Up and down the piazza, up and down, up and down, the lady walked, her eyes sometimes wandering over the wide sea, sometimes looking steadfastly at the boards she was treading, sometimes fixed impatiently on the door from which she had issued.

Ten minutes passed. The lady's brows were contracting; plainly she was not used to waiting; then the door opened, and a gentleman stepped out and joined her. A gentleman who would have looked uncommonly tall had he not stooped; a gentleman who at thirty should have looked young, but who by the aid of spectacles, an old-fashioned coat, and a preternaturally grave countenance looked old.

enough to be his own father; a gentleman who was freckled, had sandy hair, and spoke through his nose, and who was known as the Reverend Alexander McPherson, of Torwoodtown.

"Well?" said the lady, fixing her keen, dark eyes on his face, and stopping in her walk.

"Well, ma'am!" replied the Rev. Alexander, in the nasal drawl peculiar to him, "I have got through."

"It took you some time to do it," said Madame Torwood, rather curtly; "and now what do you think of it?"

The Rev. Alexander was the most honest, plain-spoken, and straightforward of men. "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," was the golden rule he persistently followed in spite of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In his hand he carried a black cudgel; he always carried it, and it would have served an Irishman at Donnybrook fair. When some tremendous bullet of truth was ready to whiz out, it was his custom to strike his shillelah a smart rap on the ground. He gave it a knock now that made the piazza ring.

"I think, ma'am, it is the most unjust, absurd, and ridiculous will that was ever heard of!"

The lady's sallow face flushed, and her eyes flashed fire.

"Sir!"

"I repeat it, ma'am," said the Rev. Alexander, giving the piazza another rap; "it's the most preposterous thing that ever was known. My late friend, the judge, must have been stark, staring mad when he made it. Mad, ma'am; mad as a March hare."

"You are mistaken, sir. My husband was perfectly sane."

"Beg your pardon, ma'am; no sane man could have made such a will! It carries absurdity on the face of it. If one had read of it in the 'Children of the Abbey,' or the 'Mysteries of Udolpho,' he would not have been surprised; but in the nineteenth century, and by a Christian man, and what is more, a *Scotchman*, and what is *still* more, a Presbyterian! Oh, ma'am, you'll excuse me, but the judge must have been as mad as a Bedlamite."

"Mr. McPherson," said the lady, facing around rather fiercely, "do you mean to insult me?"

"By no means, ma'am," said the imperturbable Mr. McPherson, no way discomposed; "you asked my opinion and you have it."

"Opinions can be rather too plainly expressed. Be good enough to remember you are speaking of my dead husband."

"It's a most extraordinary will, ma'am."

"My husband was a most extraordinary man, sir."

"I always knew him to be eccentric," said the Rev. Alexander, "but I never before took him to be quite a foo——." Here the plains-poken divine had the grace to pause, and taking an immense snuff-box out of his pocket, gave it a hard rap on the lid, and politely presented it to the lady.

"Snuff?" he inquired, sententiously.

Madame Torwood gave it aside long glance of disgust.

"Not any, thank you. You were surprised, I suppose, when I sent for you this afternoon to read my husband's will?"

"A little," Mr. McPherson replied, drawing a huge pinch of Maccaboy up his capacious nostrils, and then blowing a blast that awoke the echoes in the lonely glen. "I couldn't see the necessity for it."

"Nor I," said Madame Torwood, shortly, "and so I told the judge when he expressed the request that you should peruse it as soon as I arrived; but it was the request of a dying man, and knowing that you and he were old friends, I agreed, of course."

Mr. McPherson nodded gravely, and pulled out a huge silver watch.

"Yes, ma'am, and now is there anything else, for I must be going."

"Why, then," said the lady, coolly, "my maid has heard through the servants' gossip, and has told me, that you are paying attention—I believe that is the phrase—to Miss Torwood. Under present circumstances you will see the necessity of discontinuing those attentions at once."

Anybody but the Rev. Alexander McPherson would have been discomfited by such an offhand way of doing business; but it was not in the power of mortal man or woman to discomfit that self-possessed divine.

He only pulled out the big snuff-box again, and helped himself to another huge pinch. "Certainly, ma'am, certainly. You expect your son shortly, of course?"

"Yes, I saw him in Washington the day before yesterday, but only for a few moments. Professional duties prevented his returning with me then,

but I expect him every hour. I am waiting for him even now."

"Wait no longer then," said a voice behind them ;
"your son is here."

CHAPTER II.

LUCY.

BOTH turned round. A tall young man stood in the doorway, hat in hand, and Madame Torwood's sallow face lighted up with pleasure at the sight.

"My dear Paul," she said, holding out her hand, "I am delighted to see you. When did you arrive?"

"Ten minutes ago. The servant who admitted me guided me here—I hope I am not an intruder."

"Not at all; we were just speaking of you. Let me make you acquainted with the Rev. Mr. McPherson, of Torwoodtown. Mr. McPherson—my son, Dr. Paul Stuart."

Both gentleman bowed, the doctor with a half smile at the other's odd look, and the minister with gravest solemnity.

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Dr. Stuart," he said eying the young M. D. all over. "I have heard a great deal of you. You are very clever in cases where the brains are affected, I believe?"

"I have devoted a good deal of my time to that particular portion of the human anatomy. I trust you will never need my services."

He had a half-laughing way of saying things, this Dr. Stuart, that puzzled you, and left you in doubt whether he was in jest or earnest. His smile,

very genial and bright though it was, puzzled you too; you could not tell whether he was laughing with or at you. He did not look like his mother, and he was none the worse for that, the Rev. Mr. McPherson thought, except that he was tall like her, broad-shouldered, full-chested, and deep-voiced. His hair was light, his eyes—very handsome eyes by the way—blue, bright, piercing, yet what are called laughing eyes withal. His face was not handsome, and he wore neither beard nor mustache, but intellect sat enthroned on the broad, white brow, and refinement around the clear-cut mouth.

Dr. Stuart was sarcastic, perhaps a little cynical, but by no means out of tune with the world, fastidious, keen-sighted in reading character, and clever in dissimulation. Lavater could have told all that, but for the rest he knew best what he knew himself, whether mercenary or generous, subtle, or wearing his heart on his sleeve, faithless or constant, pleasure-loving or of hermit-like continence. Standing in the doorway, still watching the sandy-haired minister with the same doubtful smile, he looked a fine, healthy specimen of manhood—a lord of creation in every sense of the word.

A clock inside struck eight. Mr. McPherson pulled out his silver watch and consulted it again.

"Ten minutes and a half slow," he said, solemnly; "I must be going. Good-night, ma'am, good-night, doctor. The first time you visit the town give me a call—shall be happy to see you in my humble wigwam."

With which valedictory the worthy clergyman, who, strange to say, when he invited anybody, really

meant it, went off slouchingly down the piazza stairs, mounted his shambling pony, and rode away in the misty moonlight over the hills to Torwoodtown, leaving mother and son alone together.

"Who is that odd-looking customer?" was the young man's first question.

"Oh, a Presbyterian minister," said the lady with an expressive shrug; "a well-meaning man, I believe, but such a bear, such a fright."

"One of those men, I fancy like singed-cats—better than they look," and he laughed his pleasant, yet half-cynical laugh. "Well, mother mine, and how do you like Torwood Towers?"

The lady took his arm, and began walking him up and down the piazza.

"I detest it. I should die of *ennui* here in a month. It is like being buried alive."

"It is a fine old place, nevertheless."

"Yes, for the rats, the dogs, and those filthy blacks. It is like a barn, damp and cold and dreary—it makes me think of 'Marianne in the Moated Grange.' I hate it!"

"You will not live here, then?"

"I would be sorry to live here. No, indeed, I will leave it as soon as I can, and go to Washington, Baltimore, or New York."

"And that will be—how soon?"

"As soon as you are married."

"Oh!" said Dr. Stuart; and then there was a long pause.

"Mr. McPherson has just been reading the will," was Madame Torwood's next seemingly not very apposite remark.

"Has he?"

"Yes."

"And what does he think of it?"

"All sorts of insolence; that it is unjust, absurd, ridiculous, and so on."

"I agree with him."

"Paul?"

"My dear mother, you are talking to your son, your heir, your darling, your only one. Be natural; speak your mind and say you think so yourself."

"Paul, don't be absurd; I am certain that the judge never did a wiser act in his life than in the manner in which he has provided for his daughters."

The doctor laughed.

"For one of them, mother—I can't marry them all. It was his own act, of course. I am certain my dear mamma had no hand in it."

"Paul, what a detestable way you have of talking. No one can ever tell whether you are serious or in jest."

"In jest! Nothing of the kind. I never was more dismally serious in my life. I am positive you exercised no influence over him in favor of your

"Very little. I may have suggested the idea, but nothing more."

"He never saw me, yet he provides for me better than he does for his own daughters—all without being prompted. Thank you, Judge Torwood," and he raised his hat politely.

"Bah! you'll never talk sense. Have you any objections to this will?"

"None at all. How could I?"

"How, indeed. Some people are born with a silver spoon in their mouth, and value it no more than if it were lead. How long am I to be kept a prisoner here?"

"That depends upon yourself, madam."

"No such thing, sir; it depends on you. I shall stay here until you make your choice."

"Oh!" said the doctor again, and then there was another pause.

"Well?" inquired Madame Torwood, after it had lasted nearly ten minutes.

"Well?" reiterated her son, like an echo.

"Paul, I have no patience with you. You are enough to provoke a saint! Have you nothing to say?"

"Lots of things. Shall we begin with the weather! It's a safe topic."

"I shall begin by boxing your ears," said the lady, smiling in spite of herself at the young man's innocent face. "I want you to talk about these Torwood sisters."

"A delightful subject on which I know nothing whatever."

"And care less, I suppose?"

"By no means, madam; I am always profoundly interested where young ladies are in question."

"Especially when one of the young ladies is to be your future wife."

"Oh!" said the doctor for the third time, in a tone not betraying the slightest particle of emotion.

"You know," persisted the lady, "that the youngest and oldest are here?"

"I know it now—I did not before."

"Lucy and Margaret are here, one aged twenty-three, the other sixteen. Edith, who is next to Lucy, and who is twenty past, lives in Cuba—has lived there all her life."

"Has she?" said the doctor, indifferently, seeing he was expected to say something.

"Her mother, Judge Torwood's second wife, was a Creole, and this Edith was born there. At her mother's death, a Creole aunt took her, and kept her all this time. I wrote for her a month ago and received an answer from the aunt that she would obey the summons. Probably she will be here before the end of the week."

"The aunt did not require much urging to give her up?"

"Oh, it is an understood thing that she is to go back; she merely comes here in compliance with her deceased father's last request that all his daughters should spend at least half a year together in this place upon my return, for a reason which you and I already know, and which is to be explained to them when together. Their father's dying request must have weight with them, little as they knew of him. This Edith, it appears, scarcely knew him at all."

"Ah! she will not be quite inconsolable at his loss, then."

"The third daughter, Florence, aged eighteen, is at a boarding-school in New York. I called at the school the day before I left, but it was a holiday, it appears, and teachers and pupils were all in the country. I left a letter, however, for the directress,

Miss De Juponville, explaining all, telling her to pack up the young lady and her belongings, and send them on here without delay."

"Did you say the name of the directress was Madame De Juponville?" asked Dr. Paul, with sudden interest.

"Yes, that is the name."

"And the seminary is in — Street?"

"Yes, have you been there?"

The doctor laughed his very doubtful laugh, and his blue eyes looked knowing.

"Oh, I have been there. Florence Torwood—hum-m-m. Do you know what Florence looks like?"

"No; why?"

"Nothing; perhaps I have seen her there, that is all. Do you not find this night breeze chilly—shall we go in?"

"I prefer staying here. Now, Paul, my dear boy, you understand how matters are, and I am sure you will do your best and not disappoint your mother."

"Which, translated, means, I suppose, I am to be good, and mar——"

He stopped short, for through the open doorway he saw a young lady crossing the hall and coming toward them. A slender figure, with pale golden hair, dressed very simply in black, and dangling a bunch of housekeeping keys in one hand. Madame Torwood saw her too, and spoke.

"Miss Torwood—Lucy—come here one moment. This is my son, Dr. Stuart,—Paul, Miss Torwood."

"I am happy to make Miss Torwood's acquaintance," the doctor said, while the young lady dropped

her eyes and bowed in silence. "A fine old place this ancestral home of yours."

He had been taking a cool survey, not of the old place, but of the young lady while he spoke, and before he had finished his short speech, had formed his opinion. What it was he knew best, but certainly one of his conclusions must have been that she was pretty. The pale gold hair, worn in a simple knot behind, was abundant and glossy; the brow it shaded both broad and high; the features small, delicate, and regular; the complexion fair, with just enough rose tint in the cheeks to save her being called pale. It was a gentle face, placid and calm, and Miss Lucy was a fireside fairy, as you know already, shining, not in the glare of society, with very little to say, and saying that little very modestly, in a very low and sweet tone. Some youthful scions of the female aristocracy of Torwoodtown stigmatized her as "that insipid thing;" but all the world knows how the dear angels talk of each other behind backs; and Miss Lucy, though she heard it, never retaliated, but smiled upon them as gently and as kindly the next time they met as ever.

Did Dr. Paul Stuart, clever man of the world, sick of fashionable flirts and gaudy ball-room butterflies, like quiet little household angels, soft of step, silvery of voice, and deft of hand? If so, Lucy Torwood must have suited him to the finest fiber of his being, for in her, at one glance, he read all of these.

"A fine old place," the doctor repeated, his eyes turning at last from the pretty quiet face to the prospect before him; "a place to be proud of."

"Yes;" Lucy said, simply, but her eyes shone and her still face lighted as she said it.

You could see she *was* proud of it, and in her own silent way loved every tree, and shrub, and stone about it. Very fair it looked in the moonlight—all that was rough and harsh toned down and refined; the sea, flooded with the silvery light, surging in with a gentle wash on the shore, and the distant boats looking like fairy barks on a fairy sea.

"Where is your sister?" Madame Torwood suddenly asked. She had been gazing steadfastly on the water, watching a light skiff that was rapidly nearing the shore, the rope of its one white sail held by a young girl who lay in the stern singing at the top of a pair of powerful lungs some wild sea chorus.

"Madge is out somewhere—she is always out."

"Who is that girl coming ashore in the boat?"

Lucy's eyes followed the lady's index finger.

"That is Madge," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone; "she's been out sailing, I suppose."

Madame Torwood's brow contracted.

"May I ask, Miss Torwood, if it is your sister's custom to go sailing all alone?"

"Yes, madam."

"Is she—are you—not afraid she will be drowned?"

"Who? Madge! Why, there is not a fisherman in Torwoodtown can manage a boat better than she!"

"A rare accomplishment for a young lady. Pray, how many more of these fantastic tricks before high heaven does she play?"

"Madam?" inquired Lucy, looking puzzled.

Dr. Stuart laughed, and good-naturedly came to the rescue.

"Never mind, mother. 'What's the odds so long she's happy,' as our friend Punch says. By Jove! she does it well."

The heroine of the skiff had run her boat deftly up on the sands in a little cove, had sprung lightly ashore, made it fast, slung the light oars over her shoulder, and, still singing, began tripping in a jaunty, springing step up the beach. A dog—a huge Livonian wolf-hound that had been crouching in the bottom of the boat—followed her, and both made a very pretty tableau in the moonlight."

"Una and her lion," said the doctor. "Your sister is of the Di Vernon style of young ladies, I see, Miss Torwood."

Miss Torwood smiled.

"Madge never heard of Di Vernon in her life."

"She never reads then?"

"Oh, yes; but not the 'Waverley Novels.' She tried once to read the 'Bride of Lammermoor,' I remember; but gave it up at the third chapter, and told me it was—let me see—no end of a humbug."

The doctor laughed again, and Madame Torwood's haughty brow contracted still more at the sound of the slang. The phrase sounded very odd from Lucy's pretty lips, but she repeated it with so much simplicity that it had provoked the doctor's last laugh. Una and her lion were now near, and they could hear distinctly the spirited words of the old song she sung.

"Some love to roam
O'er the dark sea foam,
Where the shrill winds whistle free ;
But a chosen band
In a mountain land,
And a home in the woods for me !"

"A home in the woods?" muttered Madame Torwood. "Yes, I should think so. Among bears and wild Indians would suit you best."

All unconscious of the criticism, Madge Torwood was up the grass-grown foot-path, with her oars on her shoulder, her dog at her heels, up the piazza stairs, with her tune still on her lips, and flushed and, breathless, was in their midst the next moment.

CHAPTER III.

MADGE.

A TALL figure, slim and straight as a young poplar; shining black hair, cropped close like a boy's—otherwise "shingled;" black eyes, large, brilliant, restless a thin dark face, brown and sunburned; features irregular, and not at all pretty; shining white teeth, and hands brown and hard with exposure to the sun and wind and not a little rough work. That was Madge Torwood as she stood on the piazza in the twilight. A black straw hat, with a long black feather, sat jauntily on one side of her head; a black velvet basque, buttoned up with bright silver buttons over a black skirt reaching barely to her ankles. Perhaps there was coquetry as well as convenience in this, for mademoiselle had very pretty little feet, displayed to the best advantage in a pair of dainty, high-heeled Balmoral boots.

To say that the youngest Miss Torwood was eccentric would be to do no sort of justice to her character. Even hoidenish would be a mild term for a young lady who rode steeple-chases, could sail a yacht safely across the Chesapeake, bring down a partridge on the wing, or a trout in the water, with her light rifle, and who could dance a banjo breakdown with the strongest Sambo on her estate. A young lady who clapped the young gentlemen of Torwood-

town and the country round on the shoulder when they did deeds she approved ; called them " fellows," and ordered them about as if she had been their grandmother ; who read the sporting papers, talked slang, sang all the comic songs of the day, and knew more about prize-fights than her prayers.

Miss Madge was all this and more ; not in the least pretty either, yet half the young men in the place were going wild for her. Whether it was her black eyes, or her dashing deeds, or her spirited way of talking to them, or some nameless fascination about the witch, the bewildered youths never could tell ; but certain it is, she had three times as many beaux as any other girl in the town. Madge liked them all, and treated all precisely alike ; if she had any preference, she sometimes said, when hard pushed, it was for the Rev. Alexander McPherson, on account of his never-to-be-sufficiently admired way of always telling the plain unvarnished truth ; but, oh ! *why* need he tell it through his nose ? In this last particular she was uncommonly like him herself, always saying precisely what she thought with terrible candor, and was, in consequence, the dread and detestation of all the female element of the place. " Tomboy," " brazen," " indelicate," were their mildest adjectives when Miss Torwood the younger was under dissection, and that poor dear Miss Torwood, the elder, who tried so hard to civilize her, and failed so signally, was pitied and sighed over.

Lucy certainly had done her best with the wild girl, and if her success had not been very great, it was greater than any one else could have accomplished ; and Madge had an outlandish sense of

gratitude of her own, and would sometimes come in a good and penitent mood, after some desperate freak, and put her arms round Lucy's neck and call herself all sorts of hard names for grieving her, promising repentance and amendment of life for the future. Not that these promises were ever kept, sincere as she doubtless was in making them, and half an hour after she was galloping over the country, or sailing over the sea, risking her good-for-nothing neck as recklessly as ever. Nature had certainly made a great mistake in not making her a boy, and Miss Madge thought so too, and took the matter particularly hard.

"I was intended for a boy, and I *ought* to be a boy," was her indignant cry. "I had no business being a girl. I hate girls! and I like boys beyond everything!"

Among her other eccentricities, Madge professed no religion in particular, but patronized all. Some Sundays she went with Lucy, and stared the Reverend Alexander out of countenance with her great, solemn black eyes, and, coming home, would mount the kitchen table, tie a white napkin round her throat, and repeat to the tickled servants, word for word, the whole discourse, nasal drawl and all, to the unspeakable discomposure of Lucy. Sometimes she favored the Methodist chapel, where she sang the loudest and most shockingly out of tune. Sometimes she appeared among the Episcopal worshippers, and made eyes at sundry young gentlemen of her acquaintance over her psalm book; and sometimes she tripped in among the Catholics, and wondered why they swung incense and lighted

candles in daytime, and rang little bells ; and if the Sisters of Charity, who glided in like black shadows, with bowed heads and lowered veils, were really the broken-hearted, romantic creatures novels made them out to be.

So in riding, and sailing, and scampering over the hills with her dogs, and doing pretty much as she liked, in spite of everybody, Madge grew up to be a tall girl of sixteen. The little learning she had Lucy had imparted, for she never would go to school, and for accomplishments she could dance anything from a mazurka to a jig, play the banjo to perfection, and draw caricatures of all her friends with chalk and charcoal. She had read all Maryatt's novels, Lever's, Lover's, and all of the "Claude Duval" stamp she could lay her hands on. And now she is standing there in the moonlight while her photograph is being taken, staring at the doctor out of her great, black, dauntless eyes.

"My sister Madge, Dr. Stuart," Lucy said, for Madame Torwood, shocked and displeased, was silent.

The doctor bowed, but Miss Madge frankly held out her brown hand for him to shake.

"How do you do, Dr. Stuart? I heard you were here, and hurried home on that account."

"I am honored. Do the birds of the air carry you messages, Miss Madge? I only arrived half an hour ago."

"Mr. McPherson told me, and if he is a bird of the air he must belong to the owl species," said the young lady, taking off her straw hat, and swinging it coquettishly by the strings. Very much like a

saucy boy she looked, with her short-cropped hair, and speaking what she had to say in a voice decidedly more shrill than sweet.

"Madge," gently reprimanded her sister.

"Beg your pardon, Lucy," she said, with dancing eyes. "I forgot *you* were present. The Reverend Mr. McPherson is an excellent man, and I admire him ever so much; but he is exceedingly like an owl, nevertheless. Sancho, go down to your kennel, sir! it's time all honest dogs were in bed."

The well-trained hound got up slowly, shook himself, and gravely descended the stairs. Madame Torwood looked at him and then at his mistress with her cold, dark eyes.

"You have taught your dog what I fear you have failed to learn yourself, my dear—obedience."

"Oh," said Madge, carelessly, "there is no one alive to whom I owe any obedience but sister Lucy, and I always obey her when she orders nothing I dislike. Don't I, Lucy?"

Lucy smiled, and put her arm lovingly around the young girl's shoulder. The half sisters resembled each other very little—the one so fair, so gentle, so placid, the other so dark, so fiery, so restless; but they served admirably as foils, and made quite a pretty picture standing together.

"Let us go in," said Madame Torwood; "the night air is chilly. Have you had supper, Paul?—it is time to ask."

"No, but it is of no consequence."

"It *is* of consequence! Lucy, my dear, will you attend to it?"

"I beg—" began the doctor, but Lucy had

flitted away already, and Madame Torwood led the way into the house.

The hall was long and dark, with flooring and wainscoting of black shining walnut, very antique and romantic no doubt to everybody but the housemaids, who, twice a year at house-cleaning time, had to scrub it with soap, and water, and furniture oil, until every bone in their bodies ached. A great brass lamp, quaint and carved, swinging from the ceiling by a brass chain, served to light it, but the moonlight only lighted it now and the doctor saw there were two doors on either side, and, at the farther end, a winding staircase, up which you might have driven a coach and four. There was one oriel window at this end too, commanding a view of the grounds in front, with the misty hills rising away in the foreground, and there his observations ended, for his lady mother had opened the nearest door to the left, and they were in the drawing-room of Torwood Towers.

It was a large room, but every room in the house was that; and although the month was June and the night warm, a wood fire burned on the tiled hearth, and was very pleasant in its chilly vastness. The furniture was modern enough, too modern for the oak paneling and carved ceiling, and mullioned windows; and the Brussels carpet and gilt-framed mirrors, and chairs and sofa and fauteuils, upholstered in green velvet, and the inlaid tables, and freshly painted pictures by modern artists looked rather out of keeping with its somber gloom. There was a grand piano in one corner, with a music rack well filled beside it; a lamp in another, and a banjo

lying on a lounge; there were flowers in vases, canaries in gilded cages, books and engravings scattered profusely on the tables, and some swinging shelves filled with expensively bound volumes.

Madame Torwood, with a shiver, drew up a luxuriantly cushioned rocker to the fire.

"It is like a vault, this huge room! I expect to be laid up with rheumatic fever before I am here a month!"

"A pleasant prospect. Luckily your son is an M. D., and nothing will afford him greater happiness than prescribing for you."

"I am obliged to you! Oh, here is your supper!"

A mulatto boy entered, bearing a waiter laden with toast, cake, cold chicken, and fragrant tea. At the sight Dr. Stuart remembered he was hungry, and took his place before it at once.

"Miss Torwood must be a model housekeeper. I admire despatch of all things, particularly where my eating is concerned. Miss Madge, won't you favor me with some music meanwhile, as an aid to digestion? One cannot eat and talk, and I am certain you play like another St. Cecilia."

Madge, who had been standing whistling softly to the canaries, faced round.

"Did St. Cecilia play the banjo and Jewsharp? because they are the only instruments I understand."

"I admire the banjo, of all things. Won't you favor us?"

"If Madame Torwood can stand anything so barbarous, I shall be most happy."

Madame Torwood, nestling back luxuriously in

the rocker, with half closed eyes, glanced drowsily round.

"Don't mind me in the least, if Paul wishes to hear you."

"Prepare to be enchanted then," cried Madge, seizing her pretty banjo, and going off into one spirited negro melody after another in a manner that *was* enchanting in a small way. The girl played well; everything she chose to do she did well, and Dr. Stuart's fastidious ear was delighted.

"There!" she cried, giving the banjo a flourish as she finished "Fisher's Hornpipe." "What do you think of that?"

"I am in silent ecstasies! You sing, do you not—but why do I ask, when I have had the pleasure of hearing you already."

"To be sure I sing. Do you know 'The Ratcatcher's Daughter?'"

"I am afraid not."

"I do then; and here it is."

In her shrill voice, clear and high, if not particularly sweet, Madge set up "The Ratcatcher's Daughter," strumming a lively accompaniment on her banjo. The sound brought in Lucy, looking prettier and sweeter in the lamplight even than in the moon's rays.

"Oh, Madge! how could you sing that?" was her reproachful cry, with a deprecating look at the shocked face of madam.

"Why not?" said Madge, flinging away her banjo and opening the piano. "Dr. Stuart asked me to sing and play, and I did my best. If that best was bad I could do no more. Come! it's your turn now."

"By all means, Miss Torwood," said the doctor, springing up with alacrity. "I am passionately fond of music."

"But I play so very little!" Lucy said, shrinking back.

"Nonsense! you play and sing beautifully, Lucy. She does, upon my word, Dr. Stuart."

"I am sure of it. Let me prevail on you, Miss Torwood."

"Yes Lucy, let us hear you!" said madam, condescendingly from her throne in the ingle nook; "sing something for us—that is, if your songs are not in the same line as 'The Ratcatcher's Daughter.'"

"I knew you wouldn't like it," said Madge, coolly; "but that's not my fault. I didn't compose it! Lucy, sing 'Whistle and I'll come to you, my lad.'"

Lucy lifted her shy eyes to the doctor's, bending over her.

"I can scarcely sing anything but old songs! I am very unfashionable and countrified, Doctor."

"I delight in old songs; sing your sister's favorite, and I will join you."

So they sang the spirited old Scotch ballad together, with Madge joining immediately in the chorus.

"I hope it will be a match," said Madame Torwood, looking complacently on from behind her fan. "She will make an excellent wife for my obstinate, self-willed Paul."

There were ever so many songs after that; the doctor, who had an excellent bass voice, sang some German student's song: and Lucy, coming out of her

shyness sang, in her sweet, low voice, "Annie Laurie" at his request. She might have been Annie Laurie herself and so the doctor thought, listening to the silvery tones of the soft voice, and looking at the drooping blue eyes.

"Her face it is the fairest
That e'er the sun shone on!"

he repeated, as the faint note died away. "I think I can see Annie Laurie now!"

"In Lucy's eyes?" asked Madge, flashing a saucy glance out of her own black ones; "are you taking her photograph in your mind's eye, Doctor?"

"Madge!" reproved Lucy, rising hastily, with a vivid blush, "how can you talk so?"

"Madge has a way of thinking too loud," Madame Torwood said, coldly.

"Madam," said Madge, with gravity befitting the subject, "I went to hear the Rev. Alexander McPherson hold forth last Sunday, and he banged the dust out of the pulpit cushions, and fiercely told the brethren and sistern to tell the truth in season and out of season. I am trying to experience religion in a small way, and follow the Rev. Alexander's ghostly teachings!"

"Bah!" was madam's disgusted retort, as she jerked out her watch. "Eleven o'clock! Ring the bell, Paul—I want Fifine."

Dr. Paul obeyed, and Fifine, the French maid, with the black eyes and cunning little aprons, came in, dipping and smiling. Taking the very broad hint thus conveyed, Dr. Paul selected one from the tray of bedroom candlesticks on the table, and lighted it

for Miss Torwood, who stood waiting to say good-night.

"Pleasant dreams, Miss Torwood," he said, and Lucy rewarded him with a gentle smile; "pleasant dreams to you likewise, Miss Madge!"

"Oh, they will be delightful," said Madge, making him a sweeping parting courtesy; "I shall dream of you!"

"Bold, forward minx!" was madam's angry criticism, as the black head and the fair one disappeared; "if there is anything I abhor in young girls, it is pertness."

"Good-night, mother," Dr. Paul said, gravely, lighting his own candle. "Which is the way to my room?"

"Fifine will show you," said his mother; "good-night!"

All the chambers in the house were on the third story. Dr. Stuart saw a flickering star of light and two black skirts flitting into one of them as he reached the landing above, and he passed on to his own room, whistling "Annie Laurie."

It was a pretty room that which the orphan sisters occupied in common, with one large bow window commanding a sunny southern prospect, a charming recess of a window, with a cushioned divan running round it, and curtained with white lace and crimson damask. All its furniture was quaint and old-fashioned, the mahogany old as the hills and thick with eruptions of brass-headed nails; the bed, curtained and covered with white, emblematic of purity and all that sort of thing, was large enough to have held the Seven Sleepers, and in the queer-looking

mirror over the dressing-table Lucy Torwood's great grandmother, on the female side, had looked on her bridal night.

"Oh, how sleepy I am!" exclaimed Madge, with a terrific yawn, beginning rapidly to undress; "I am as tired as if I had been on the treadmill, and feel as if I could sleep a week."

"Don't forget your prayers," Lucy interposed gently.

"Bother!" said Madge, but nevertheless she went down on her knees for about a minute and a half, then jumped out of all her clothes at once, leaving them, according to custom, in the middle of the floor, dived into a long white wrapper, leaped into bed, and nestled down among the soft pillows with a luxurious sense of intense sleepiness.

Lucy stood before the mirror combing out her long, bright hair, looking thoughtfully at her own pretty face, when Madge's black head suddenly bobbed itself up.

"Lucy!"

"Well, dear?"

"How do you like Dr. Stuart?"

"Very well."

"I don't, then. I hate him!" very drowsily, though, for so energetic a declaration.

"That's very wrong," said Lucy, placidly, "you shouldn't hate any one."

A pause—Lucy goes on with her combing, and Madge dozes. Presently the black head starts up again.

"Lucy!"

"Well?"

"Do you think he's handsome?"

"Who?"

"Dr. Stuart."

"No."

"Neither do I. I can't bear him. He look sat you with that hateful smile, as much as to say 'I know all about you, you know, but I won't tell.' Oh, he's horrid!"

Another pause—Lucy finishes her combing, puts all her pretty hair in a little muslin cap, dons her night-dress, throws a shawl over her shoulders, and, still looking very thoughtful, sits down by the window in the cushioned recess, and Madge goes off into another doze. Suddenly, with a jerk, the black head is off the pillow once more."

"Lucy!"

"Well—what now?"

"I mean to make him fall in love with me."

"Who?"

"Dr. Stuart."

"I doubt it."

"But I shall, though!" with a sleepy defiance. "The man has to be born yet that could resist me. I'll make him fall in love with me, and then I'll—I'll——" what the conqueress would do Lucy was not destined to learn for the closely cropped head here fell back on the pillow, and Madge was fast asleep at last.

Peaceful and picturesque, even poetical, the old house and its surroundings looked in the white June moonlight, its tall trees waving, and the dim hills shutting it in like a green girdle. With a little smile on her face, Lucy Torwood sat in the broad

window looking out while the hours of the night wore on. Two o'clock struck sonorously from the hall clock below, and Madge awakened up from her first sleep.

Awakened to find herself alone, and a white figure, wrapped in a shawl, still sitting in the window and still looking out. The head was off the pillow for the fourth time.

"Lucy!"

"Yes, dear."

"What o'clock is it? Are you going to sit there all night? What are you about?"

Lucy got up then, threw off the shawl, and, stooping, kissed the already closing black eyes.

"Nothing," she said; "you have been dreaming with your eyes shut, my dear, and I have been dreaming with mine open—that is all."

CHAPTER IV.

COMING EVENTS, ETC.

"Lucy!"

"At it again, dear? What now?"

"How long have you been up?"

"Half an hour."

"What time did you come to bed last night?"

"I did not go to bed at all last night."

"What!"

"Certainly not—it was two this morning."

"My stars! And what on earth were you up to?"

"Nothing; I did not feel sleepy, and so preferred sitting by the window and watching the moonlight to tossing restlessly in bed. Do you mean to be there all day? It is after six."

It was a pleasant scene and hour—just the thing for an artist, had any eyes so sacrilegious been looking on. The morning sunlight came brightly through the open bow-window, and lay in great golden squares on the carpet—with it floated the odor of the lilac trees—purple and white—the scent of sweet brier, and the matin hymn of numberless birds.

Lucy Torwood, looking pretty and fresh in pale blue muslin, with the daintiest of linen collars and cuffs, her fair hair combed smooth, and a bright morning flush on her delicate cheeks, stood before

the mirror putting the finishing touches to her toilet. Madge was still nestling among the pillows, her arms clasped over her head, and her black eyes opening and shining like two sable stars.

"It is after six," Lucy repeated, pulling out her watch; "have you been bewitched? When did six o'clock ever find our Madge in bed before?"

"Echo answers, When?" said Madge, rolling lazily out of bed on the floor, and beginning with the greatest deliberation to dress. "Perhaps there is a loadstone in the house. I fell in love last night, didn't I?"

"You are the best judge of that yourself, my dear."

"Well, I don't know—I fall in and out so often—it's a way I have. Look here, Lucy, how long is Dr. Stuart going to stay?"

"I don't know."

"What brought him here, I wonder?"

"What a question! To see his mother, of course."

"I don't believe it. When I met McPher—beg pardon, Lucy—when I met the Rev. Alexander McPherson last evening in Torwoodtown, he looked uncommonly knowing when he spoke of our visitor, and hinted something about papa's will making some one of his four daughters over to the doctor. The creature wouldn't speak out plainly, but took snuff, and waddled off on that horrid spavined, ring-boned, rheumatic pony of his. What brought him to Torwood yesterday, anyway?"

"Madame Torwood sent for him."

"What for? She does not know him from Adam."

"No; she sent for him to read papa's will."

"What business had he reading it? What's in the will?"

"I don't know."

"I should think you had a better right to know than old Solemnity. Hook my dress, will you? Why didn't you ask him what was in it? He would tell you anything."

"Nonsense! I can't fasten your dress if you keep jerking about so—be still."

Madge seized the hair-brush, having no hair worth speaking of to comb, and smoothed down her short locks.

"It's so provoking about that will. Are we never going to hear it?"

"Of course we are, when the proper time comes."

"And when will that be—doomsday?"

"Not quite so far off I hope—when Edith and Florence come."

"And you have no idea what the Rev. and so on meant?"

Something like a flush rose and faded on Lucy's face—something like a conscious smile lighted and dried on her lips.

"I have an idea, but never mind it. Don't trouble your dear silly little head with such solemn things as wills; you will hear it all time enough."

"I hate waiting," said Madge, testily, "and I'm sure you know if you only like to tell. I wonder if papa has divided his money equally between us four sisters. You ought to get the largest share, Lucy; they say it was *your* mother's fortune made him rich."

"So it was."

"And our mother was as poor as that destitute fowl, Job's turkey, in everything but beauty. I wish," said Madge, looking at herself in the glass, "she had seen fit to leave her youngest born a little of it. I don't see why I'm not pretty. When nature was so ridiculous as to make me a girl, she might at least have made me a handsome one."

"So she might—it's a great pity."

"There's Florence, now," pursued Madge, unheeding Lucy's laughter; "when she was here two years ago spending her vacation, everybody went wild about her beauty, and she was as proud herself as a dog with two tails." I say it is not fair that one of the family should monopolize all the beauty, and the rest be as plain as hedge fences."

"My dear," Lucy laughed, "what are you thinking of? The rest are not as plain as hedge fences. I dare say Edith is pretty, and I am sure I am."

"Yes," said Madge, reflectively, "you're good-looking, I allow; and I dare say I should be too, only I have all the talent that ever ran in the Torwood family, and I have always heard that beauty and brains never go together. But Edith, she's pretty, is she? How did you find that out?"

"I have not found it out; I merely said it was likely."

"I don't believe she is then; I suspect she's as black as the ace of spades in that red-hot climate. You never saw her, did you?"

"Never."

"I should like to see her above all things. She will be here shortly, won't she?"

"Madame Torwood expects her every day."

"What a dilemma Dr. Stuart will be in between us four nice girls! I declare he's to be pitied! It reminds me of a poor bewildered fly drowning in a bowl of molasses. I'm pretty sure he'll select me, though, I'm such a dear little thing every way. I don't see how he can help it."

Lucy laughed.

"Little thing, and she as tall as a Maypole. Seven o'clock positively! I should have been down-stairs half an hour ago."

Giving Madge's short tresses a playful pull in passing, Miss Torwood tripped away "on hospitable thoughts intent." And Madge, clapping her jaunty straw hat very much on the side of her head and sticking her hands, man-fashion, in the pockets of her short sacque, ran down-stairs, three at a time, whistling shrilly one of her favorite airs, "The Fisher's Hornpipe." The great front door was wide open, and, crouching on the upper step, awaiting her coming, was her large hound, Sancho Panza. Madge stooped down and gave him a caressing pat on the head.

"Good-morning, old fellow; how do you find yourself to-day? All ready for your constitutional, eh? Come on then."

If early to bed and early to rise have the good effect that that solemn and stupid old gentleman, poor Richard, says, Miss Madge Torwood should have been the healthiest, wealthiest, and wisest young lady in Maryland, for that early bird, the lark, was generally routed out of his cozy nest at some gray and dismal hour of the early morning, by her springing from rock to rock, singing at the top of a pair

of powerful lungs, and Sancho at her heels. Healthy, she certainly was; no one knew her to be ill a day in her life; wealth was rather more doubtful—it depended altogether on that mysterious will of papa's—and wise, was most doubtful of all; her worst enemy could not accuse her of wisdom.

Over the rocky hillsides she flew now, springing from jag to jag like a young deer, with the tune still on her lips.

As the clock in the Episcopal Church in Torwoodtown struck the hour of eight, and the calls of hunger began to be clamorous, she turned to retrace her steps in the same bounding style, loudly chanting the fag-end of some old Scotch ballad.

“Laud’s the larrock’s note and lang,
Lilting wildly up the glen,
But still to me it sings ae sang,
Will ye no come back again.”

“Yes, here I am!” a voice answered, and springing up from the long grass on which he had been stretched, book in hand, Dr. Stuart confronted her.

“Law!” said Madge, “you here? Who’d have thought it?”

“Any one with common sense. Do you suppose no one but Miss Madge Torwood knows the benefit of early rising?”

“I don’t pretend to have common sense; it’s a thing I despise; but if I did possess it, I should hope it would teach me better than lying down lazily to read such a morning as this. Look at that sky, azure and snow on fire, with little pin clouds all through it; look at the lights and shadows going mad on the bay; look at these rosy clouds of laurel

climbing up the rocks. Oh, that I, were an artist! I could paint a picture this morning that would set the world on fire, or write a poem which would make me famous for life."

"What, on me?"

"No, a sheet of paper if I had it. Are you hungry? If not I am, and I am going home to breakfast; Lucy's muffins are particularly nice, and her coffee—heavenly!"

Dr. Stuart sprang up, laughing.

"Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen! from painting and poetry to muffins and coffee. Still the difference is not so great, after all, for those ideal fellows, poets, painters, authors, and artists of all sorts, are quite as sensible of the blessings of muffins and coffee, and the other creature comforts of this life as the most prosaic chaw-bacon in Maryland."

"Precious fools they would be if they weren't. My belief is that the best part of one's life is what they spend in sleeping and eating. The world's no trouble to one, then."

"Trouble! I should think all you knew of trouble is that it is a word of two syllables."

"That shows how easily even the wisest of men may be mistaken," said Madge, who, all the time she had been talking, was bounding lightly from rock to rock, while the tall doctor measured off the ground with tremendous sweep of limb. "I've had the heaviest sort of miseries in my time—silent sorrows and all that sort of thing—till I have pined away to a mere skeleton. You might have noticed I am as thin as a sheet of paper."

"So you are—almost transparent! May I ask how so sad a state of things came about?"

"Well there was, or rather is, for I am a continual sufferer, a conglomeration of circumstances. I am not as good-looking as Lucy, and that worries me; my beaux—and I have about three dozen, such as they are—have a way of dropping off one by one, after I have gone and splashed my heart's best affections, and so on, upon them, and marrying somebody else. Mr. McPherson, the only man I ever really was in love with, calls me a vessel of wrath, a mystery of iniquity, and other hard names of that sort, and couldn't be paid to touch me with a pair of tongs. Then I'm a girl, the last, unkindest cut of all; and Captain Marryatt, the only author I ever did care about, had to go and die, and consequently won't write any more, and—but where's the good of going on? I'm a persecuted but patient saint, and I've come to the conclusion that this world is all a fleeting show, not worth looking at, and you needn't be astonished if, some day, you hear of me joining those 'Sisters of Charity' over in Torwoodtown—that is," said the young lady upon second thought, "if they'll consent to my wearing gay garments, and decent looking Christian bonnets instead of black stuff coal-scuttles. I don't believe there's any religion in going about the world a figure and a dowdy, and a mark for the finger of scorn to poke fun at. Here we are at the house, and there is Lucy at the dining-room window, and I feel voracious enough to eat a Quaker's grandmother, body and bones."

"Tough picking," laughed Dr. Stuart, following

the spirited speaker of this tirade up the wide stairs to the dining-room. Lucy turned from the window as the pair came in.

"Good-morning, Dr. Stuart ; I thought you and Madge had run away together. It is half-past nine."

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Torwood ; but I assure you we let no grass grow under our feet. Is my mother not down ?"

"Madame Torwood always breakfasts in her room, her maid says, about half-past eleven. I suppose she will hardly be down before luncheon ; but you two must be hungry after your long walk in the breezy morning air."

"We *are*," said Madge, flinging her hat in one corner, her sacque in another, and taking her place with alacrity at the table. "My performance is always good, but on the present occasion it is going to be absolutely terrifying. Dr. Stuart, let me help you to eggs—try these muffins—your coffee is sublime this morning, Lucy—I told the doctor it would be."

"Miss Torwood does everything well, I think," Dr. Stuart said gravely, and Lucy laughed and blushed.

"Madge is such a chatterbox ; but she does not mean half she says. Were you at Torwoodtown, this morning ?"

"Not so far," said the doctor ; "but I should like to go if you two young ladies will do me the honor to drive over with me."

Lucy held up her bunch of housekeeping keys and gave them a shake,

"How can you dream of such a thing? You forget what a busy character I am; but Madge will go."

"To be sure I will," said Madge, "but I won't drive. I despise driving, and leave it to weak-minded young ladies like Lucy. I'll ride with you, though, with all the pleasure in life."

"If Dr. Stuart has any regard for his neck he won't ride with you," said Lucy. "You and Rozinante will come to grief some day by breaking every bone in your bodies. Madge is always a little crazy, but she goes positively wild on horse-back."

"I don't mind risking my neck in a good cause," said Dr. Stuart as they arose, "but I regret you cannot join us, Miss Torwood. Can you not take a holiday?"

"Not possible; besides——"

"Besides, I wouldn't for any earthly consideration ride with Lucy," cut in Madge, "or rather crawl along as she does, scared into fits if her horse takes one of his steps longer than another; and, besides, I consider one lady as much as any one gentleman can properly attend to at once; so, Dr. Stuart, if you coax Lucy to come, I respectfully beg leave to resign."

"An alternative too terrible to think of. Be off then and dress—'if it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' I shall go and have the horses around in a trice."

It never took Madge long to make her toilet; in fifteen minutes she was standing on the topmost step of the outer stairs, her riding-hat one side of

her boyish head, her long riding-skirt gathered up in one hand, her whip flourishing in the other, while with a critical eye she watched the sable groom leading up the horse.

"Now, then," said Dr. Stuart, when all was ready, holding out his hand, "mount."

Madge laid her exquisitely-booted foot in his extended palm, and sprang lightly into the saddle.

"Mount yourself, now," she said, taking up the reins. "Be quiet, Rozinante! Go on, Lucy. If we are not back in a fortnight we shall be late!"

Lucy, standing in the doorway, laughed, and watched them galloping off, and when they were quite out of sight, returned to her domestic duties. If any regret at losing the glorious summer day lingered in her breast, her placid face did not show it, and Madame Torwood, coming down-stairs at half-past twelve, found her sitting at the drawing-room window, sewing away diligently with a great basket full of gray cotton before her.

"Good morning, my dear," she said, casting a curious eye at the unattractive work. "How industrious you are. What is it all about?"

Lucy held up a garment she was making, with a little blush.

"Plain clothes for some poor children in Torwoodtown. I cannot do fancy work, and I like to be busy at something."

"Oh!" said madam, rather contemptuously. "Where are the rest?"

"Dr. Stuart and Madge have gone out riding, and will hardly be back before dinner."

Lucy's eyes bending over her work, did not

notice the frown that settled darkly over the lady's face.

"Why did you not go too?" she sharply inquired.

"I was too busy, madam."

"Nonsense! You should have gone and left that ridiculous work to the seamstress. Young ladies are not in the habit of cooping themselves up and working themselves to death for beggar children. Charity is all very well, but there is such a thing as carrying it too far. I would have been much better pleased had you gone out riding this morning."

With which tirade madam sat down, jerked some crochet work out of her pocket, and relapsed into silence and the arms of an easy-chair. Lucy said nothing, only she lifted her blue eyes in quiet surprise, and when she lowered them again the pink tinge on her cheek was deepened.

It was dinner hour and after when the equestrians returned, and Madge flashed into the drawing-room, her twin cheeks flushed, her eyes dancing, her whole spirited face elate and glowing with the excitement of the ride, and looking for the moment more than pretty. Dr. Stuart came after her, and stood, hat in hand, in the doorway.

"Twenty minutes late," said his mother, pulling out her watch, "and I detest being kept waiting. I give you both ten minutes to dress for dinner. If you are not ready, then, we will wait no longer."

"Short notice," said he, "but it will suffice. It never takes pretty people like you and me, Madge, long to dress."

"And whichever is ready first will come and

help the other," Madge cried, as she ran up-stairs, and darted into her own room.

Dinner was not so pleasant a meal as breakfast had been, for Madame Torwood sat like a petrification in black satin and jewelry, and froze every attempt at sociability at its dawn. Even Madge was, for the time being, quenched, and ate her peas, and carved her pastry with a pensive and preoccupied air. It was a relief when the tiresome meal was over, and the great lady took to dozing over her crochet.

Madge went out to seek recreation with Sancho and Rozinante and the gossip of the kitchen; Lucy resumed her seat at the window and her very plain sewing; and the doctor, drawing the ears of a little black and tan terrier through his fingers, sat thoughtfully watching with half-closed eyes. Through the window at which Lucy sat he could see the dying day fading grayly out in blue haze, the moon rising crimson and full, the evening star gleaming in its pale beauty, and the trees as they murmured faintly in the low breeze from the bay. The cry of the katy did and whip-poor-will, plaintive and sweet, came floating through the open casement, and with it floated in the evening incense of jasmine, southern-wood and sweet-brier. Through the opposite window he could see the blue sea creeping in over the flat gray shore, with a grayer sky overhead, and the white sails of boats dotting it here and there like fallen snowflakes.

It was all very peaceful and very pretty, but nothing was prettier than the quiet girlish figure in black barege, with the fair hair combed smoothly

off the fair face, the blue eyes drooping over her work, the white fingers deftly plying the glistening needle, and so Dr. Stuart seemed to think, for his eyes wandered oftener, and dwelt much longer at that window than at the other. They had sat quite silent for upward of half an hour; it was the doctor's caprice, perhaps, and decidedly Lucy's forte, and the gray gloaming was fast deepening into misty night when he leaned forward and spoke.

"Have you been in the house all day?"

"Yes—all day."

"Sewing like that?"

"Sewing like this."

"You will kill yourself. I am a doctor and won't allow it. Go instantly, put on your hat, and come to the garden for a walk."

She laughed, blushed, and hesitated.

"Go," he said, peremptorily, "physicians are not to be refused. I intend taking you under my sovereign jurisdiction and making you go out every day. Go!"

She dropped her work, but still hesitated. A dozing head was lifted from a distant arm-chair, and a gracious voice struck in:

"Certainly, my dear, go out for a walk. The evening is fine, and it will do you good."

Lucy arose instantly, took her hat, which hung in the hall, and, followed by the doctor, went into the hazy summer evening. They took the road leading down to the water, and watched, as they walked up and down, the children playing in the warm sands, and the waves crawling up with a dull, low roar. The old house and everything around it looked

peaceful and at rest, and the two quiet figures walking up and down under the green trees were in keeping with its calm. Dr. Stuart took off his hat and bared his head to the cool sea air. "It is good to be here," he said; "Torwood Towers is an enchanted spot, Miss Lucy. I envy you your home."

Some inward thought flushed the young lady's tranquil face hotly for a moment, and her voice was slightly tremulous, though her words were trite enough.

"Yes, it is a pretty place in summer, but too quiet some think. It has never seemed so to me."

"Its quiet will soon be broken now, I fancy. Are not your two sisters expected soon?"

"Very soon now. Edith we expect to-morrow; Florence before the end of the week."

"You have seen them of course?"

"Florence, yes; she was here two years ago, spending her vacation; the last she spent with some friends in New York. Edith I have never seen."

"Indeed?" he said, inquiringly.

"She was born in Cuba and has lived there all her life. She will be quite a stranger to us all."

"You and your youngest sister are very much unlike. Which does Florence resemble?"

"Neither," she said, with simplicity; "Florence is beautiful!"

He looked at her with an odd smile.

"If you were like other young ladies, Miss Torwood, I should think you were angling for a compliment, but I know you better. If you were like other young ladies I might pay you one with perfect truth, but as it is—"

He broke short off, and began rooting up some pansies in his way with a cane he carried, watching the work of destruction intently. He did not even look up when he spoke again, so the rosy light in Lucy's face was unseen.

"You are blonde, Madge is a brunette ; which is Florence ?"

"Blonde. It has been said that Florence and I are Torwoods—Madge and Edith Tristas, their mother's name."

"Edith, then, is dark ?"

"So I suppose. I long for to-morrow to see her."

The queer smile was on the doctor's face again ; it always was there when he spoke of Florence. A bed of cinnamon roses was in their way. With that doubtful smile still on his face, he plucked a half-blown bud and handed it to Lucy.

"Do you understand the language of flowers ?" he asked, looking at her.

All gentlemen ask that question, but Lucy *did* understand, and blushed vividly.

A pair of black eyes, glancing through the shrubbery, as their owner tramped over late reeds and green vines, with her dog Sancho after her, saw the action, the blush too, and a shrill voice broke out into song :

"There were three little women,
Each fair in the face.
And their laughter with music
Filled all the green place,
As they sat knitting talk
With the threads of their lace.

Of the wind in the tree-tops,
The flowers in the glen,

THE SISTERS OF TORWOOD.

The birds, the brown robin,
The wood-dove, the wren;
They talked, but their thoughts
Were of three little men.

The sea lay before them,
With ships going by,
Behind them the hills shone,
So grand and so high,
And above them blue, beautiful
Patches of sky!"

Dr. Stuart laughed.

"They talked, but their thoughts
Were of three little men,"

he quoted. "How much more human nature, female human nature, there is in that line."

"Madge is always absurd," Lucy said, swinging her rose carelessly in her finger-tips. "It is getting late; suppose we go in."

"On one condition, that you will sing for me again these pleasant old ballads of yours."

"They are not worth listening to; but if you wish it, with pleasure."

Another pair of eyes watched them coming together to the house, and Madame Torwood, standing at the window, smiled complacently to herself.

"I shall succeed, after all," she said, confidently to herself and the window curtains. "Paul will not find it so hard to comply with Judge Torwood's last will and testament, I think, and my son will be master here."

The evening was genial and homelike. Lucy, at the piano, sang; Dr. Stuart turned the leaves of her music; Madge was absorbed in a new novel, and

Madame Torwood dozed with one eye open, and drew her own conclusions.

"Yes," she said to her pillow that night, "she is an insipid little nobody, with no mind ; but she has a pretty face, and Paul is only mortal, so I think it will be a match after all."

CHAPTER V.

EDITH.

TORWOODTOWN, which, by the way, was much more of an exaggerated village than a town at all, consisted of one long, straggling street, of queer-looking houses, with gardens in front full of purple-and-white lilac trees, rose-bushes, and sweet-brier vines, making the summer air fragrant as you walked along. The straggling row of queer houses fronted the ceaseless sea; its moan was in your ear, its saline freshness in your lungs, its cold spray in your face, its fresh and bracing breezes cooling your brow wherever you went through Torwoodtown. There was a battery and a breakwater, a dry-dock and a wharf, where a steamer from Baltimore came every week, and the fishing boats were drawn up in rows on the shore.

The place had derived its ambitious name from the late Judge Torwood, who, coming there when a very young man, had pompously named the dirty little fishing village after himself; and as the inhabitants had never taken the pains to re-christen it, and wandering map-makers passed it over in grand, silent disdain, Torwoodtown it continued to be called. For all the wandering map-makers' contempt, it was a flourishing little place, with its dry-goods and grocery shops—stores even their ambitious

proprietors dared not name them—its post-office, its school-house, its lecture-hall, its hotel, and its Episcopal, Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches.

This last establishment, under the ghostly care of the Rev. Alexander McPherson, stood midway down the straggling street, and was a dreary looking wooden edifice, painted outside a dismal and dingy brown, and was inside a dreary Sahara of empty benches, with a pulpit like an overgrown wine-glass. An equally dreary and dingy structure was the house adjoining, with prim poplars in the garden, and green paper blinds on the sulky windows, and an inhospitable front door that never stood open to the summer air.

Entering this front door you were in a long grim hall, that ended abruptly in a steep staircase, like the hall, carpetless. Some absurd people have a ridiculous fancy for adorning their entrance hall with pictures and statues. This particular one was adorned with rows of wooden pegs, from which hung overcoats, caps, hats, and umbrellas, and sundry other useful articles of wearing apparel, making the place serve for wardrobe and hall together. A brown door with a brass knob was on either hand. Opening the one to the left, you precipitated yourself with exquisite unexpectedness into a not over-clean and very hot kitchen, where there was an odor of onions and dinner all day long. Opening the door to the right, you were in the parlor, reception-room, drawing-room, dining-room, and library of the mansion, for it was all in one. The uncarpeted floor was painted a jaundiced yellow,

the cane-seated chairs, six in number, were ranged stiffly against the gloomy paper-hangings, in the same spot to an inch on which they had stood ever since they *were* chairs.

A square table with a limp and dejected table cloth of sad colors, stood in the center of the painted floor, which was so slippery that it was a trial to persons of weak nerves to navigate through it. There were books on the table, a number of them—books on long rows of shelves, solemn and formidable looking books, of plethoric fulness, that none but strong-minded people could have contemplated with comfort even reposing on their shelves.

The ornamentations of the apartment consisted of two large oil paintings in very dirty fly-spotted and discolored gilt frames, one of that grim and uncompromising old Presbyterian, John Knox, opposite a portrait of the late lamented George Washington, in a highly colored complexion, a gorgeous uniform, and a big wig. The whole aspect of the place was of an intensely grave and gloomy order, and in strict keeping with it was the aspect of the gentleman sitting in one of the six cane-seated chairs by the window, spectacles on nose, deeply absorbed in the columns of the *Scottish Observer*.

The gentleman was near-sighted, and his nose and the type were almost meeting, so he did not notice the approach of a visitor until a thundering postman's rat-tat-tat, given with the end of a riding-whip, made him fairly bound with its noise and suddenness out of his chair. Before he could go to

the door it was opened, and a slight girlish figure in a dark-green riding-habit with brass buttons, a black hat set on one side of its head, the short, back hair streaming in disorder, the round, boyish forehead, the black eyes sparkling, the thin, dark face, luminous and glowing, stood in the doorway like a picture in a frame.

"Good morning, Mr. Mac!" the new comer said in a shrill, treble voice; "here I am, all alive, like a bag of grasshoppers! I've been riding away out about ten miles from here, and coming back; it struck me it might be near your luncheon hour, so I thought I would drop in and make you a neighborly call. Am I too late or too early?"

"For what, Miss Madge?" inquired Mr. McPherson, folding his paper and taking snuff. He always fortified himself with that refreshment when he encountered the youngest Miss Torwood.

"Your lunch, of course."

"I never take lunch."

"Don't you? that's a pity. What do you take then; I suppose you don't fast all day?"

"I take dinner."

"Well, that will do—it's all the same in Greek. At what hour do you generally go through the performance?"

"Two o'clock."

"And it wants a quarter of two now," said Madge, looking at her watch; "and here comes your old lady to lay the cloth. That's beautiful. How d'ye do, Mrs. Grant? How's your rheumatism to-day?"

The old housekeeper dropped a courtesy.

"It's pretty bad, Miss Madge, thanky. How's your pretty sister?"

"Oh, she's jolly! And that's what's been tormenting me so, Mr. McPherson; for the last day or two she's been a great deal too jolly; and if you don't come and look after her shortiy, you're dished."

Mr. McPherson took snuff again.

"I don't think I quite understand what being dished means. Will you be kind enough to explain, Miss Madge?"

"Why, it's as clear as mud. It means your cake's dough; that you're being cut out: in short, that our dear step-brother, Dr. Stuart, is going in to win."

"Humph!" said Mr. McPherson, with infinite composure; "that reminds me, Miss Madge—how do you like your new step-brother?"

"Dying about him. I am, 'pon my word. He's all my fancy painted him, you know; he's lovely, he's divine; but his heart it is Miss Torwood's, and it never can be mine. That is, I'm dreadfully afraid it can't; though what anybody can see in her when *I'm* to the fore is more than I can imagine. Lucy's as good a little soul as ever lived; but, then, she's as weak as dishwater."

"And so Dr. Stuart is attentive to her? Draw in your chair, Miss Madge, and partake of my humble meal."

"Taken the greatest shine to her ever you saw," said Madge, drawing in her chair promptly and helping herself; "gives her rosebuds and all that sort of thing; and when it comes to that a man's

pretty far gone. You see, I've had no end of experience with the creatures."

"And your step-mother looks on and approves, I suppose?"

"Approve! I guess so. She's as bland as sweet oil, as sweet over it as a whole cartload of summer cherries. And that's where the puzzle comes in—I'll trouble you to pass the beans, please—the lady is so haughty, bristling with pride in every pore, that I am amazed she thinks anything less than a princess good enough for her Paul—her only one! But she's quite content with Lucy; your humble servant she wouldn't touch with a pair of tongs."

"Is it possible?"

"Bad taste, but true as gospel. However, don't be uneasy, Mr. McPherson" (Mr. McPherson all the while eating his dinner with the most complacent of faces); "I am not so sure that you have lost Lucy after all. I should like to see her Mrs. Mac of all things. She is just the cut for a minister's wife—takes to darning stockings and mending old clothes as naturally as if she were one now."

"Let me help you to some more gravy, Miss Madge? And so you think I am not altogether dished yet? What are your reasons for thinking so? You always have reasons for your opinions, I know."

"To be sure; I admire logic beyond everything; and, then when that uncommon article, common-sense, was being distributed, I came in for about double the usual share. My reasons are, that there are two more Miss Torwoods coming, one this very day, and the other before the end of the week, and

both will be sure to make a dead set at him, and undermine Lucy if they can."

"Miss Madge, you are a little severe, are you not? Do you judge your sisters by yourself?"

Miss Madge laid down her knife and fork, and looked with some severity across the table at her host.

"Mr. McPherson, I shall feel obliged to you not to insinuate things. If I wanted Dr. Paul Stuart, you don't suppose there is anything living, and breathing, and existing in petticoats that could prevent me from having him. Do you, sir? The idea is beneath contempt. What I mean to say is, that two women in one house, and two cats over one mouse, never agree; and what it is to be with four cats in the house, and only one poor, helpless mouse between them, I dare not imagine. Dr. Stuart is to be pitied; for what can he do against four young ladies, all badly in want of husbands?"

"Yourself among the number?"

"Certainly; no girl ever reached the age of fourteen without wanting to be married. Oh, here comes the stage. I wonder if there are any passengers."

Without ceremony, Miss Madge jumped up from the table and ran to the window. The stage-coach, a lumbering old vehicle, built much upon the style of Noah's ark, drew up before the Torwoodtown Hotel with a great clatter and commotion. Yes, there were passengers—two, a lady and a gentleman; the former tall, slender, and evidently youthful, though her face was hidden by a thick, black veil, dressed in deep mourning; the latter rather

foreign-looking, not tall, swarthy as a Spaniard, with jetty hair and mustache. The lady took his arm and passed with him into the hotel and out of Madge Torwood's curious sight.

"Well, they are gone, whoever they are, and I think it is time I was following their example. I've got lots of places to go to, so it will be near dinner hour when I get home, and my lady raises no end of a row if one keeps dinner waiting half a second. When are you coming over to Torwood?"

"Can't say. Madame Torwood gave me a hint to keep away until sent for; had I not better take it?"

"I wouldn't if I were you. I should come and keep my eye on Lucy; but of course, it's a free country, and Mr. McPherson can please himself. If Rozinante and Sancho are not tired waiting, they beat Job hollow, so I'm off. By-by."

Kissing her hand to him, and nodding familiarly, Madge pirouetted to the door, and was off like a flash, banging the front door after her until the house shook. The next instant he saw her flying past on Rozinante, her riding-dress streaming in the sea wind, and Sancho bounding furiously after her. Mr. McPherson gave his snuff-box a sharp rap, and took an immensely huge pinch to compose his nerves after the stimulating visit, and with a grim smile dawning on his face, took up the *Scottish Observer* and his seat by the window again.

"A smart little girl that," was his thought, "and there is sense in her nonsense, too. I think I *shall* go back to Torwood and look after Lucy before long."

Miss Madge Torwood proved herself a prophetess in saying it would be near dinner hour when she got home. It wanted just fifteen minutes of that important hour when she flew singing up-stairs, and came bouncing into Lucy's room, carrying the fresh sea and hillside breezes in every fold of her flowing dress. Lucy was standing before the mirror, making herself look pretty for dinner, and turned a face as fresh as the half-brown rose on her dressing-table to her wild, younger sister. It was the rose Dr. Stuart had given her last night in the shrubbery, and Madge pursed up her lips at sight of it. It was the first time that day she had seen Lucy alone, and seizing the rose now, she began inhaling its fragrance in very loud and exaggerated sniffs.

"My love is like the red, red rose that's newly sprung in June;" he is also 'like a melody that's sweetly played in tune!' I say, Lucy, you and our young friend, the doctor, put in a long stitch of courting last night, didn't you?"

"Oh Madge!" Lucy cried, her whole face turning crimson, and shocked beyond expression at this rather coarse way of stating things. Madge sat down on the edge of the bed, and eyed her much as a merciless dentist does a patient whose double teeth he is bound to haul out in spite of any amount of agony.

"It was very like it, though, wasn't it? Did he really make love to you? What did he say?"

"Oh, Madge how can you?"

"What am I doing?" said Madge, testily. "You might tell me, I think. Did he say, 'Beloved of

my soul?"—that's the way Lord Mortimer used to put it in that lachrymose book, 'The Children of the Abbey.' "

"Madge, dress for dinner—you'll be late," Lucy said, trying to laugh, while her cheeks were scarlet. "Where have you been all day?"

"Over the country. What were you and the doctor about? Making eyes at each other all the morning?"

"Good-by—make haste—there's the five-minutes bell," said Lucy, moving precipitately to the door.

"I saw Mr. McPherson this morning and he's going staring mad with jealousy," Madge called after her. "He consumed something less than a pound of snuff during the time I was there, and——" but Lucy was down-stairs, and out of hearing, so Madge brought her little work of fiction to an abrupt end, and began rapidly exchanging the riding-habit of Amazon life for the more subdued habiliments of the dinner-table. Ten minutes sufficed at any time for Madge to make her toilet, and at the end of that time she came flying down-stairs, and out on the front piazza, where Madame Torwood, Dr. Stuart, and Lucy stood. A plain black buggy, bearing the inscription, "Torwoodtown Hotel," on its side, was coming down the high-road between the hills, while a cart followed laden with trunks, imperials, valises, and bonnet-boxes. A lady and a gentleman sat in the buggy; the gentleman, dark-mustached, and foreign-looking, the lady clad in mourning and closely veiled. Madge uttered an exclamation as she saw them:

"Law! I declare if it's not the pair I saw leaving the stage in Torwoodtown. I say, Lucy, I'll bet you anything it's Edith."

Lucy's high color had faded away, and she was unusually pale and quiet as she watched the new arrival.

"I think it must be," she said; "but who is the gentleman?"

"I never heard that Edith was married," said Madge; "but she appears to be on mighty free and easy terms with his gentleman. See how confidently she leans on his arm, and what a black-looking whiskerado he is, with as much hair about his face as if he were a Chimpanzee monkey."

The veiled lady certainly *did* lean confidently on her companion's arm, from fatigue, perhaps, for she toiled rather wearily up the steps. Madame Torwood, very stately, in black satin, gold chain, and diamond brooch advanced with the air of a dowager duchess, and the dark gentleman took off his hat and addressed her.

"Madame Torwood, I presume?"

Madame Torwood bowed in cold silence.

"Allow me then to present your step-daughter from Cuba, Miss Edith Torwood."

It was she, then! Whilst the gentleman spoke the lady threw back her veil, and they all saw that the second Miss Torwood was not pretty. So far from it, indeed, that Madge's inward exclamation had been, "How ugly she is!" but, then, Miss Madge was apt to jump at conclusions. Not ugly, mainly, but at once plain-looking and proud-looking, with a sallow complexion, a forehead so broad

and high as to be almost masculine, arched, black brows, shading a pair of powerful, dark gray eyes and the characteristic mouth of the Torwoods—a feature that was alike in all, and was really pretty, though there were certain firm and decided lines about this young lady's that certainly were wanting in Lucy and Madge.

Madame Torwood held out her hands, and Miss Edith laid her delicate, black-kidded fingers lightly therein, with a steadfast look out of the gray eyes, but no smile round her pretty mouth.

"My dear, I am glad to see you, and to welcome you to your ancestral home. These are your sisters, Lucy and Margaret."

It is a very vulgar thing to show emotion, or make a scene about anything in this commonplace world. Perhaps the new Miss Torwood was too high-bred for anything so plebeian as feeling, or perhaps her nature was very undemonstrative, for the kidded fingers were held out to Lucy and Margaret with the same quiet composure they had been given to her step-mother. Perhaps, too, there was nothing to wonder at in this grave quietude—they were her sisters, it is true, but then she had never seen them before, and very likely when she left Torwood Towers would never see them again. Madame Torwood, who had a masculine horror of scenes, drew a long breath of relief, and really began to admire the new-comer. But Madge touched the black-kidded fingers as if they were red hot, and dropped them in disgust a second after.

"A black iceberg! Lot's wife in crape and silk.

I shall hate the very sight of her, I know," she said, turning, with a grimace, to Dr. Stuart, who stood quietly in the background looking on.

A smile, and a warningly lifted finger, was his answer, and Madge, shrugging her shoulders impatiently, began humming a tune and beating the devil's tattoo with her feet.

"And this gentleman?" Madame Torwood inquiringly began, looking at the dark stranger, hat in hand.

"Is my cousin, Mr. Angus Torwood, in whose charge I have come from Cuba."

It was the first time she had spoken, and her voice was like Lucy's, sweet and clear, deeper perhaps, and with a strong foreign accent, that gave a charm of its own to every word.

"I did not know you had a cousin of that name," madam said, loftily returning the stranger's equally haughty bow.

"My father and his were first cousins, but they had not met since their youth."

"I am much obliged to you for your care of my step-daughter, sir. You will stay and dine with us; dinner is waiting."

Anything colder than this polite invitation human lips could not have expressed. The dark stranger drew himself haughtily up.

"Your thanks are not needed, madam," he said pointedly; "permit me to decline your invitation. Edith," he leaned forward, and said something rapidly in Spanish.

A fiery light had leaped like a tongue of flame into the gray eyes; two red spots, like hot jets of

blood, burned in the fallow cheeks; the dark, still, proud face was in an instant brightly fierce.

So thought Madge, watching her.

"Our iceberg is a spitfire, too. Oh, they're a precious pair, I know."

"Come back to-morrow, Angus," she called after him in English, as he went slowly down-stairs.

"Come back to-morrow and see me! Until then, adieu."

She waved her hand to him as he passed from sight. Madame Torwood swept past with a stormy rustling of satin to the dining-room, and the rest followed.

"You will dine with us, Edith," Lucy softly said, as she came in last.

"No; I dine at the hotel. Be kind enough to let the servant show me to my room, and have my trunks sent up."

"I will show you the way myself. I had the room that used to be your mother's boudoir fitted up for you."

The angry light in the proud gray eyes softened; the irate and haughty face grew subdued.

"You are very kind," she simply said. "Is this it? Don't let me detain you. Good-afternoon."

The door closed in Lucy's face, and she went back to the dining-room. The three faces round the table were a study—madam's, so grandly displeased; the doctor's, so silently roguish and amused; and Madge's ill repressed impatience and indignation.

"Such a pair," cried Madge, shrilly. "As black as the ace of spades both of them, as ugly as sin, and as proud as pigs with rings through their noses!"

(Where Madge ever got her similes was the constant wonder of all who heard her.) "Did you ever see anybody as ugly as this new sister of ours, doctor?"

Dr. Stuart laughed.

"My dear Madge, Byron says no man till thirty should know there is an ugly woman, and I am only twenty-five. I have no doubt, when we come to know her, she will turn out to be what her sisters are—an angel!"

Though he spoke to Madge he was looking at Lucy, whose color rose and whose eyes fell. Madame Torwood resentfully struck in:

"If Miss Edith Torwood, or that young man imagined I was going to ask him to stop here, they were very much mistaken. I don't believe in filling with young men a house where there are girls—I don't consider it delicate; and whatever lofty notions Miss Edith Torwood may possess, she will find I am mistress here."

Lucy looked distressed, the doctor grave, and Madge carved her chicken in savage silence. It was rather an ominous beginning, and Miss Edith's *début* had been anything but a success.

Going up to bed that night as the clock struck eleven, Lucy Torwood stopped at Edith's door, and softly turned the handle. It was not locked, for the very good reason, perhaps, that it had no lock, and Lucy went in. It was a pretty room—all pink silk—and the bed, in a shadowy corner, was draped with rose silk and white lace curtains.

On it lay Edith lay fast asleep; her pale face looked statuesque in the shaded lamplight, but her long eyelashes glistened with bright drops, and her abun-

dance of glossy dark brown hair, and the pillow on which her cheek rested, were drenched with tears.

"Poor child!" Lucy said, turning away; "she can feel after all. If she but knew what destiny lies in store for her at Torwood Towers, she might well weep."

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE GATE.

DR. PAUL STUART, being a medical man, understood the benefits of early rising, and as six chimed sonrously from the old hall clock, he was leaning against a huge rock down on the shore, smoking his meerschauum, and enjoying the beauties of nature. The sun had risen in the bluest of summer skies, piled with billows of translucent white; the sea lay as smooth as a great blue-burnished mirror, and boats danced over it like fairy barks on a fairy sea. The birds were chanting their matin hymns in the woods behind him, the waves crept up to his feet with a low musical splash, and the grim old house, with all its eastern windows glittering like sheets of gold, lay as peaceful and still as the Enchanted Castle of the Sleeping Beauty.

"And that castle contains three sleeping beauties," was Dr. Stuart's thought as he eyed the blue smoke from his pipe contemplatively. "Lucy the gentle, Edith the proud, Madge the hoiden; but Florence, the last, the brightest, the best, when will you shine out in your brightness and eclipse them all?"

Alone as he was, he laughed to himself, and the laugh was echoed by some one behind him.

He turned and saw, not Madge, as he had expected, but Edith Torwood, the Creole, coming down the

sloping walk, with her sister's great dog, Sancho, gamboling furiously around her. It was at his clumsy antics she was laughing—she had not seen Dr. Stuart at all. In the fresh morning air and sunshine, she looked far brighter and better than she had the evening before; certainly she looked elegant and refined, a lady to her finger tips. Her dress was black silk, full and flowing, a crimson sacque that contrasted well with her dark face and hair, and on her head a black Spanish hat of velvet, with a long sable plume drooping over it, tipped with vivid scarlet. Around her neck she wore a slender chainlet of gold, to which was attached a jet cross encircled by rubies. All black and scarlet, everything about her dark and rich, she looked like some tropical bird alighted down there by mistake, on that Maryland shore.

"Keep off, sir," she was saying, in her sweet, foreign accented voice, laughing, as she shook the huge paws off her dress. "Get down, I tell you! See how you are soiling my skirt with your dirty paws. I'm ashamed of you."

"Where is the haughty little princess we had last night, I wonder?" thought Dr. Stuart, still placidly smoking, and looking on, "not this bright-robed laughing Aurora, who rises with the dawn and romps with dogs. I'll speak to her, I think; she does not look over formidable, and I flatter myself I am quite as conversable a companion as Sancho. Good-morning, Miss Torwood."

He started up, bowing easily as the dark gray eyes fell on him at last. Miss Torwood ceased patting Sancho's rough head suddenly, her laughing face

darkened at once into gravity, and the bow was returned very distantly and coldly, indeed. But Dr. Stuart was not to be discouraged by trifles.

"A lovely morning, is it not? I was under the mistaken notion that I was the only one in Torwood Towers who had risen to enjoy it."

"You belong to Torwood Towers?" she said, in cold inquiry.

"For the present, yes. They neglected to introduce me last night, so permit me to perform that ceremony now. Your obedient—Dr. Paul Stuart."

"I thought so," Miss Edith said, with a slight bend of her proud head. "Come, good dog; shall we have our walk?"

But Sancho, thinking he had escorted her far enough, and that he would leave the rest to the doctor, politely licked the caressing hand, and trotted back to the house, to await his morning orders from his own proper mistress.

"Your escort has deserted," Dr. Stuart said, coolly replacing his meerschaum between his lips; "very ungallant of him."

She smiled slightly; she had a very bright and very pretty smile, the doctor noticed, but she walked away in silence. He made no offer to accompany her—probably he was judge enough of human nature, that being his forte, to know that a cold stare of surprise, and a colder "No, sir, thank you," would have been his reward. Leaning against the rock, and looking over the wide sea, he stood smoking and thinking. Thinking and thinking, while the white sails came and went, and the sea-gulls wheeled in circles round him, sometimes with that peculiar

mocking smile of his, so roguish and so knowing, playing round his lips, sometimes with brow darkening and contracted. But whether smiling or darkly grave, he still stood and thought, and smoked until he saw the black and red figure coming slowly back over the sands, and the same moment heard a well-known shout behind him. He turned, and so did Edith, as Madge, who never walked like any other Christian, came springing like a water kelpie over the rocks toward him.

"Oh, here you both are!" she cried, quite breathless; "I have been hunting everywhere for you, and came to the conclusion at last that you had eloped together."

The doctor laughed, but Edith frowned. Madge, heeding neither, ran on:

"It is near ten o'clock now, and we are supposed to breakfast at nine. When you both have done sentimentalizing over sea-weed and sand-banks, perhaps you will come up to the house and have something to eat."

"An excellent notion," said Dr. Stuart. "I had quite forgotten I was hungry, until you came, like the dear little angel you are, to remind me of it. Have you been out this morning?"

To be sure! There isn't a rope in Torwoodtown strong enough to hold me indoors such a day. Oh! I forgot I had a message for you, Edith. I saw Mr. Angus Torwood a while ago, and he told me to tell you he would not come over until evening."

"Why?"

"That's just what I asked him, and he gave me one of his black looks, and muttered something

about being unavoidably detained. Of all the horrid men I ever saw——”

A grimace finished the sentence, for the gray eyes were flashing angrily.

“Be good enough to spare your criticisms before me,” she said, haughtily, “and remember he is *your* cousin as well as mine.”

“Well, I don’t know that he is any the better for that,” said Madge, who took rebuffs as coolly as compliments. “He’s more like a banished prince, or one of those Italian chaps you see in pictures, with cocked hats, and cut-away cloaks, and hidden daggers, and scowling brows, than an every-day Christian. But perhaps it’s the fashion to be black and dismal in Cuba—everybody that I ever knew from that blessed little island made it a point of conscience to be so.”

“How many have you known from there?” Edith asked in her cold, constrained tones.

“Only two—Miss Edith and Mr. Angus Torwood.”

“Miss Edith and Mr. Angus are exceedingly obliged to you.”

“They ought to be—perhaps they don’t hear the truth everyday,” said Madge, composedly, and Dr. Stuart, half-laughing, came to the rescue:

“It is of no use being angry with Madge, Miss Edith; she is a privileged character, says and does precisely what she likes, and nobody minds her. When you know her better, you will find out she does not mean half she says. There is Miss Torwood looking out for us; she will begin to think we are incorrigible loiterers.”

Lucy stood on the back piazza, and held up an admonitory finger as they drew near.

"Late again! Do you know you have kept breakfast waiting for a whole hour? Edith, my dear, good morning. How did you sleep last night?"

"Thank you, very well."

They passed into the dining-room together, Lucy presiding.

"If your coffee is lukewarm, your eggs hard, and your beefsteak burned, good people, blame yourselves, and not me or Aunt Polly. We did our best, but eatables *will* spoil. Edith, you take nothing."

"I am doing very well, thank you," said Edith; but she said it absently, sipping her coffee in silence.

All through breakfast she was very still, rather thoughtfully than in pride or sullenness. Perhaps she was thinking of Dr. Stuart's words. "Nobody minds what Madge says," for when the meal was over, and that young person standing at one of the windows, humming to herself her favorite ditty of "The Three Little Women," two hands fell lightly on her shoulders, and a sweet foreign-accented voice spoke close to her ear.

"And so you don't like Cousin Angus or me, little sister?"

Madge looked carelessly around. A smile, half-sad, half-amused, lingered round the proud lips, and with the blunt frankness that was at once her best and most terrible trait, answered:

"No."

"And why not, pray? What have we done?"

"Lots of things! You are both as proud as Lucifer, and as sulky as bears with sore heads. Nobody

dare handle either of you without kid gloves, and I hate all such folks like poison."

"Then you hate me?"

Madge's answer was a shrug, and the strong gray eyes searched her face intently to see whether its frankness were real or assumed. Evidently she concluded it was the latter, for the bright smile deepened.

"Nevertheless, my dear, I think I should like you very much by and by. I want to talk to you; so, if you have nothing better to do, come up with me to my room."

"I promised to go to Torwoodtown this morning," said Madge; "but, however, I can put off that, I guess, until after luncheon."

Edith put her arm around her waist, and Dr. Stuart, sitting in an arm-chair, apparently ten fathoms deep in a magazine, watched them covertly as they left the room.

They were alike, these two sisters, tall and slender, both with dark eyes and hair, and with a certain likeness of feature, but with this all resemblance ended. The expression was entirely different, and the deep, thoughtful brow, and grave, penetrating gaze of the elder, were utterly lacking in the round, boyish forehead and vivacious black orbs of the younger.

Edith's room, when she had entered it the night before, was a pretty one, but fairy fingers had been at work in the interval, and it was ten times prettier now. The walls were hung with lovely little gems of pictures, all portraits of exceeding beauty and price. There was one of their own mother, the

second mistress of Torwood, a dark, beautiful face looking earnestly out at you from rippling masses of coal-black hair, and with a striking resemblance to Edith, in the solemn depths of the uplifted eyes. There was one of Mary of Lorraine, of Marie Stuart, of Josephine, Jeanne D'Arc, and, last of all, a portrait of herself taken at ten years old—a thin, spiritual little face that startled you with its prophecy of wonderful things to come. Volumes of engravings, charming escritaires, inlaid portfolios, magnificently bound photograph albums, half a dozen queer little statuettes of peris and satyrs, fans of marabou and peacock feathers, one open jewel-case filled with trinkets, a great pile of books, and dozens of other knickknacks were scattered about.

Madge opened her eyes and stared about her in grand, careless surprise.

"Law! what funny things! Have you Aladdin's lamp, Edith, and did you sit up rubbing it all night?"

"Not exactly, only I brought some of my treasures with me from Cuba."

"I saw you had a cart-load of luggage. What a pretty face that is, and what beautiful ladies those are up there! Who's that pretty woman with the ruffle and queer little cap?"

"Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots."

"Ah, poor thing! she got her head cut off, didn't she? How nasty it must have been to be a queen in those times. Who's the one beside her?"

"Her mother, Mary of Lorraine. Do you know there was a Sir Angus Torwood who won a great victory for her once? He was an ancestor of ours,

and the chief of the great Highland clan from whom we are descended. The Torwoods were great people in those days."

Though she laughed, her eyes had lighted proudly; but Madge only stared at the picture unconcernedly.

"Were they? Who'd ever think it! I suppose Sir Angus was like his namesake, another black-browed, brigandish-looking chap, so savagely stuck up nobody dare look at him. But look here, where did you get all these pretty things? I thought our Creole aunt was desperately poor?"

"She was once, but she married a rich planter. Come and help me to unpack my dresses. I don't know where I shall put half my things."

Unpacking and talking, the sisters were so busy that the morning hours passed unheeded, and both were astonished when Lucy's smiling face looked in, and Lucy's sweet voice told them it was luncheon hour.

"Who'd have thought it," said Madge; "I don't know where the morning has gone to. I declare, Edith, you're not half so disagreeable as you look."

"Madge!" Lucy cried, reprovingly, but Edith only smiled, and the three passed together into the dining-room.

Madame Torwood was there, very dignified and stately, in satin and crape and jet ornaments, and at sight of her and her frigid brow, Edith turned from life to marble again.

Dr. Stuart still sat where they had left him in the morning, as if he had never risen; but he rose now, and took his place with the rest.

"Dr. Stuart wishes us to go driving this afternoon," said Lucy, "what do you say, Edith? you have not seen much of Torwoodtown."

Edith's petrified face and compressed lips said "no," but Madge struck in coaxingly:

"She says yes—don't you, Edith? Torwoodtown's splendid, and Doctor Stuart's driving is something sublime. Say you'll come."

"I second your petition," Dr. Stuart struck in; "say yes, Miss Edith; nobody ever refuses Madge."

"And I never rebel against rightful authority—so yes, with pleasure."

Immediately after dinner the young ladies hurried off to dress, and the doctor gave orders to have the old-fashioned family chariot brought round. Lucy, looking pretty and graceful in her slight mourning dress of crape, and a white little bonnet with black adorning, took the front seat with Dr. Stuart, at his particular request, and Madge and Edith took the other, and, with madam's critical eyes upon them, the whole party drove off. The mistress of Torwood turned away from the window with a self-satisfied little smile.

"I think it will be all right," she said to herself, with the summer sunbeams playing at her feet. "He chose Lucy; Madge is a romp, and Edith is a compound of pride and insolence; what will the fourth be like, I wonder?"

The last crimson ray of sunset had faded out, and the round white moon, and her handmaidens, the stars, were out in their silvery beauty before the party returned. Lucy and Dr. Stuart still occupied the front seat, but in the back, between the two

girls Mr. Angus Torwood was sitting very much at his ease. Madame Torwood was out on the front piazza enjoying the moonlight and odor of the sleeping flowers as they all came up the stairs together.

"How late you are; it is eight o'clock. Good-evening, Mr. Torwood. Have you dined, young ladies?"

"We had an impromptu dinner at the hotel," said her son, "and enjoyed it amazingly—didn't we, Madge?"

"Speak for yourself," said Madge, resentfully. "I know the mutton was raw, and the chicken as tough as if they had come out of the ark, and the pudding they gave us like so much lead. I never expect to get over the effects of it—there!"

"Lucy, child," said madam, suavely, "your dress is thin, and you will catch cold in the night air. Come in all of you."

A wood fire flickered on the hearth, the lamp burned brightly on the table, the curtains were drawn, and the drawing-room at Torwood Towers looked a very pleasant place just then. The young ladies went away to take off their things, and when they came back Dr. Stuart and Mr. Angus Torwood were deep in a game of chess. Edith came and leaned over her cousin's shoulder, Madge took her station at the Doctor's elbow, while Lucy and Madame Torwood looked on with interest from the opposite side. With so many bright eyes upon them, no wonder the young men did their best, with knit brows and unsmiling faces.

"A drawn battle," Edith said, gayly; "which is to be the conqueror?"

"I am," the doctor cried, springing the very move he had long planned; "*checkmated!*"

The dark face of Angus flushed hotly; but Edith's hand fell lightly on his shoulder.

"Beaten, but not vanquished—try again! A Torwood can die but never yield; isn't that so, Cousin Angus?"

"I shall play no more," was Cousin Angus' answer; "let us have some music instead—play for us, Edith."

"An excellent idea," said Dr. Stuart, sweeping the kings, queens, bishops and castles together in a heap. "Miss Edith, I am waiting to be enchanted."

"You will wait a long time before I enchant you," said Edith, moving in her proud and careless way to the piano. "What shall I play for you, Angus?"

"Something of Beethoven's; one of those songs without words you play so well."

Edith's white hands swept over the keys, and what grand, grateful tones the instrument gave out to her master touch! Very different was it to Lucy's school-girl jingle—solemn and sweet the notes floated through the room, making such melody as the old paneled walls had never echoed before. When she rose, the trance of silence that followed was the best applause—even cold Madame Torwood was spellbound.

"Oh, Edith! how well you play!" was Lucy's cry, and that broke the spell.

"You should hear her on the organ," said Angus, looking proudly at her. "She is a second St. Cecilia."

"There is an old parlor organ down in the library," said Lucy; "it shall be fixed. It belonged to your mother, Edith."

Dr. Stuart still sat silent ; but Edith, chancing to glance his way, read more admiration in his face than any words could have expressed. She laughed and turned to Madge, who sat in an extremely fidgety condition, and had yawned fearfully during the performance.

"I suppose you were transported, too, Madge. How did you like it?"

"Oh, not at all!" said Madge testily. "Anything more dismal I never heard before, not even at Mr. McPherson's meeting-house. If you had kept on much longer I should have been asleep. Let's go out; it's a sin to waste such good moonlight."

"Yes, let us go out," echoed Angus, starting up; "I must be moving very soon in the direction of the hotel or I will be locked out. They keep primitive hours over there, and mine host has no faith in latches."

Lucy brought shawls, and all went out. A strange figure sat at the gate, a figure muffled in a cloak with the hood drawn far over the head. It started up as they drew near, looming aloft so tall that its head seemed in the misty light to belong to a person of unusual stature. It stood only for a second, and then dashed through the shrubbery into the woods, and was gone, but not before a wild, shrill shriek cleft the still night air. It came from the lips of Edith, who had sprung back, and stood with distended eyes, and a face blanched as death.

"Good heavens!" Lucy cried, pale and trembling, "what was that dreadful thing, and what ails Edith?"

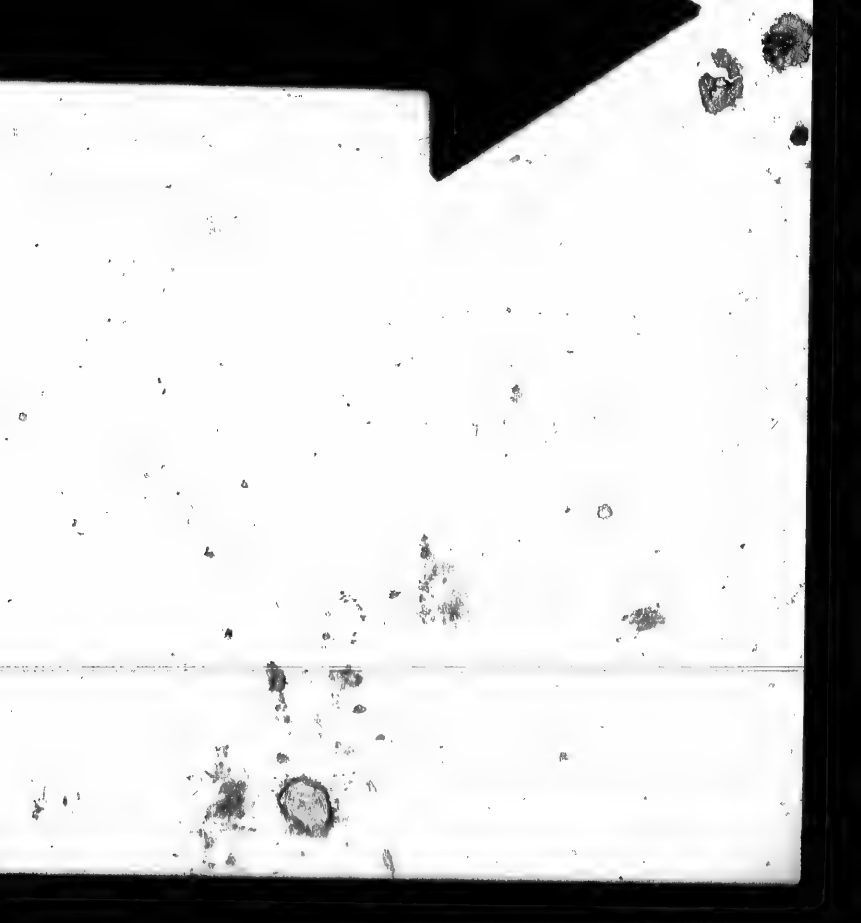
At the sound of her name, Edith laid her hand on

her heart, as if to still its tremulous throbbings, and looked round. She must have had wonderful self-control, this strange Edith, for finding all eyes fixed upon her, she forced a smile.

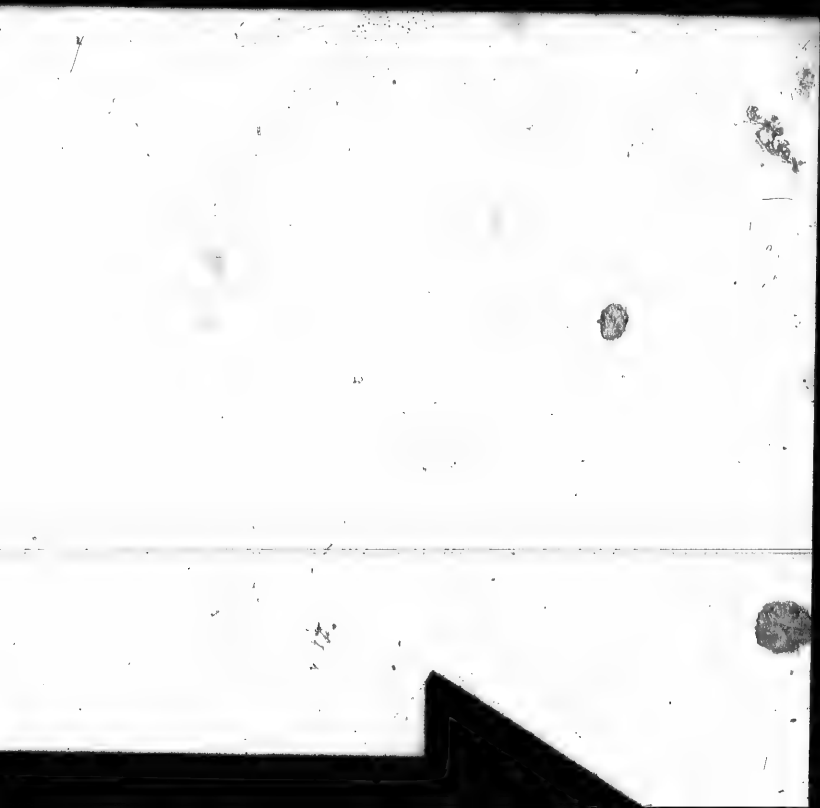
"It is nothing—that figure startled me—a beggar, I suppose! Let us go on!"

"A beggar," thought Dr. Stuart, following slowly with Lucy. "No, Miss Edith, that was no beggar, nor are you a young lady to go into hysterics for all the beggars in Maryland. There is something odd in all this."









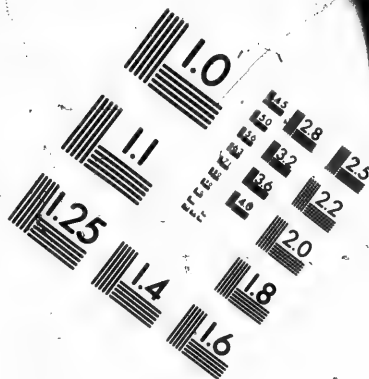
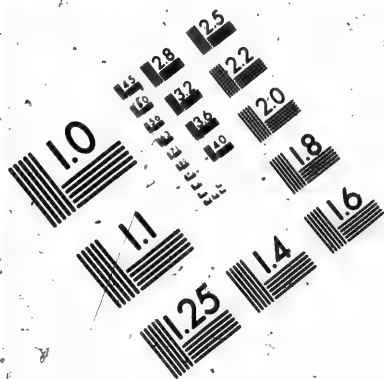
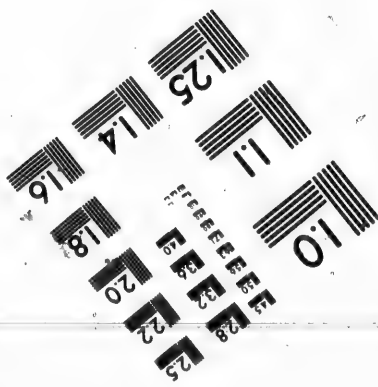
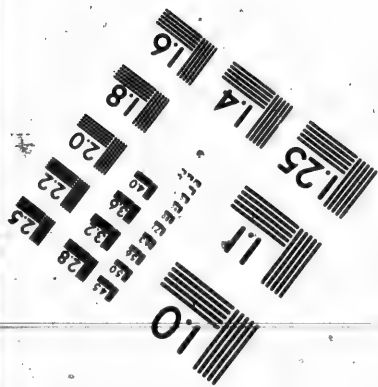
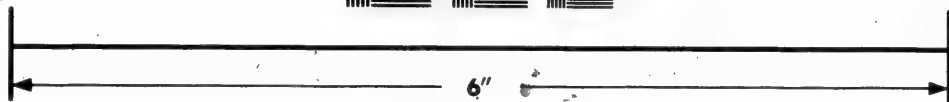
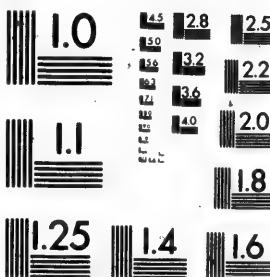


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CHAPTER VII.

FLORENCE.

"PAUL!"

"Yes, mother."

There was an old elm, with long green arms, out in the grounds, with a bench invitingly beneath its shade. On this bench Dr. Stuart lazily reclined reading, out of the way of the morning sunshine, and here his lady mother, wandering listlessly through the shrubbery, found him.

"I have been searching for you everywhere, and fancied you had been carried off again by that rude creature, Madge."

"Allay your fears, then, my good mother—your son is safe."

"Paul, I want to talk with you."

"I am all attention."

"You were out very late last evening."

"Is that what you want to say?" It was eleven o'clock, if you call that late."

"It was late under the circumstances. You were with Miss Torwood, were you not?"

"With three of them, madam."

"Nonsense! Edith was with her cousin, and Madge had her dog—the companion that suits her best. You were with Lucy."

"So I was—you are right."

"You stood on the piazza talking to her, after the rest came in?"

"Did I? Let me see. Oh, so I did."

"What did you say to her?"

"Several things. What's this they were?" said the doctor, closing his book and looking reflective. "Yes, I think I remarked that the night was beautiful, and Lucy responded 'lovely'—a style of remark to which, I flatter myself, no exceptions could be taken except on the score of originality."

"Bah! I want you to talk sense. How do you like Miss Torwood?"

"Exceedingly. You haven't got such a thing as a match about you, have you? I should like to light a cigar."

Madame Torwood frowned a little, but kept on:

"Do you like her well enough to marry her?"

"My dear mother, spare my blushes. How can you ask such dreadful point-blank questions?"

"Answer it."

"Certainly, I do, then. I only wish I could marry every young lady in the world. I assure you I should make them all happy in no time."

"You like her better than Edith, of course?"

"Miss Edith is a very charming young person, indeed."

"And better than Madge?"

"Miss Madge is delightful."

"You know, Paul," madam said, lowering her voice confidentially, "you couldn't have Edith even if you wished, and I am very glad of it, for a more impertinent piece of pride I never saw in my life."

"Are you not a little severe? Here, take a seat

beside me. Now, why could I not have her if I wished?"

"Because," still more confidentially, "I think she is in love with her cousin."

"Oh!" said Dr. Stuart, and he laughed that peculiar and most doubtful laugh of his.

"Well," said his mother, irritated by the sound, "and what are you laughing at?"

"Oh, nothing—don't mind me! Only a notion I have."

"What is it? Don't you agree with me?"

"Not exactly."

"Do you mean to say you think I am mistaken?"

"If you will permit me to say so."

"Paul, are you blind or stupid? I tell you I am right."

"Perhaps so; I merely fancied you reversed the case."

"How?"

"Why I thought he was in love with her, instead of the way you put it."

"It is the same thing."

"Indeed! I did not know that. So you think I stand no chance against cousin Angus?"

"Paul, I detest the tone you talk in. One cannot be sure whether you are in jest or earnest, and you know this is no laughing matter."

"Very far from it. It is growing to be the most desperately serious matter of my life."

"I don't understand."

"No, I suppose not. Never mind, though; I dare say you will some day."

"Edith being out of the question, then Lucy only

remains; for, of course, that overgrown child and rude romp, Madge, is not for a moment to be thought of."

"As a wife for me—no. I think not, for many reasons—first and chief among them being, that she wouldn't have me."

"I dare say she is enough of a simpleton to refuse gold for pitiful tinsel. Lucy then only remains."

"Ah! I thought there was another—what is this you called her? Florence, wasn't it?"

"To be sure! Yes, I quite forgot Florence! and they say she is very pretty, too!"

The doubtful smile, roguish and knowing, was on the doctor's face again—perhaps at his mother's deeply thoughtful and musing tone.

"And young men are all slaves of their eyes. Well, I don't know her, of course, but she ought to be here to-day, and then—but, Paul, do tell me, you may tell your mother, you know—what do you think of Lucy?"

"I think her," said the doctor, lounging more comfortably on the bench, "a most estimable young lady, very nice looking, et cetera, and the best housekeeper in existence."

"Bah! I don't mean that. In plain English, will you marry her?"

Dr. Stuart made a slight grimace, but ended in a laugh.

"Really, Madame Torwood, you are the most terrible inquisitor I ever met with. You hit the nail on the head at once."

"Paul, will you marry her?"

Dr. Paul started up.

"Be easy, good mother, and I will tell you a secret—if ever I do marry, my wife will be one of Judge Torwood's daughters, rest assured of that."

"Will it be Lucy?"

There was a clatter of horse's hoofs, the low barking of a dog, a shrill treble voice shouting good-by to some one else, and then Madge Torwood came dashing down the avenue, mounted on Rozinante, with Sancho Panza at his heels. Madge always looked her best on horseback—she looked her best now, her thin cheeks flushed, her black eyes blazing with life and spirit, her jaunty riding-hat perched saucily on one side of her shingled head, her dark green riding-habit fitting her tall slim figure to perfection. She lifted her hat like a jaunty little cavalier to the lady as she passed.

"Whither away so fast, pretty one?" quoted the doctor, from the novel he was reading.

"To Torwoodtown, and I am going to fetch somebody back to dinner."

"Who?"

"Mr. McPherson; he has been too long away, and I want him to come and look after a piece of his property he is in danger of losing. By-by. Get along, Rozinante!"

"What does she mean?" madam asked, frowning.

"*Quien sabe?*" replied the doctor. "The Sphinx is plain reading compared with that damsel. Have you anything more to say to me, mother, because I am going to smoke? But don't hurry yourself on my account, I beg."

And while Madame Torwood, taking this delicate

hint, moved away with an expressive shrug, and Dr. Stuart, lying at full length on his bench, solaced himself with cigars and fiction, Madge was galloping over the mountain road, between the Towers and the town. She had almost reached her destination, and was urging Rozinante, who, from some cause best known to himself, seemed disinclined for exertion that morning up hill, when the animal stumbled and nearly fell, stopping short with a whine of pain.

"Why, Rozinante, old fellow, what is the matter?" exclaimed Madge, very much astonished at this unusual behavior on the part of her gentlemanly steed. "What the mischief's wrong with you, I want to know?"

"Your horse has lamed himself, I think," said a quiet voice near her; and, looking round, the young lady saw a figure lying on the grass, on whom the cares of life and a green shooting-jacket appeared to sit easily. A brown straw hat was pulled over his face, a gun and an empty game bag lay on one side of him, and a shaggy Newfoundland crouched on the other. This latter got up with a deeply bass growl of sight of Sancho, who returned the growl with compound interest, and stared hard at the intruder.

"Make your dog let mine alone," ordered impatient Madge. "Sancho! hold your tongue, sir."

"Down, Faust!" said the gentleman, still without getting up. "You will have to dismount, young lady, I am afraid. Permit me to assist you."

He sprang up at last, set his hat properly, and held out his hand. Madge eyed him before she took it, and set him down for about the best looking

specimen of his sex she had viewed for some time. He might have been three-and-twenty, certainly not more, slender and boyish of figure, with large, lazy, handsome brown eyes, a profuseness of most desirable curling black hair, a thick black mustache that was perfection in its way, features regular and classical enough for some old Grecian statue, hands and feet like a lady's, and carrying a sort of easy, off-hand air about him that became him well. Though his dress was careless and common enough, you could see at a glance he was a gentleman—his voice alone would have told that; for he spoke in those modulated and refined accents that can only come from education.

As Madge continued to sit and stare at him, he took off his hat and made her a courtly bow.

"Mademoiselle eyes me gravely. I hope I meet her approbation."

"Oh!" said Madge, whom nothing ever had the power to discompose, "you started up from the earth so suddenly, that I was not sure I had not come face to face with a genie out of the 'Arabian Nights,' and wanted to make sure. Are you certain you have not enchanted my horse?"

"Not to my knowledge! I would much rather enchant his charming rider—if I could."

"You did well to add that last clause, because you couldn't do it, you know, if you tried till doomsday. Just look at Rozinante's foot, will you, and see if he can carry me to Torwoodtown."

The young gentleman obeyed this cool request, and examined Rozinante's pedal extremity with a critical eye.

"I fear not; he has lamed himself rather seriously. You had better dismount, and I will lead him for you."

"I'll dismount," said Madge, eying his proffered hand rather disdainfully, and springing lightly out of the saddle; "but I'll not trouble you to lead him, as I can do that myself. Poor Rozinante! poor fellow! how did it happen, I wonder?"

As Madge examined the animal's afflicted foot with a face full of concern, the young man threw himself on the grass again.

"Don't go yet! You and Rozinante are tired—don't say no, I'm sure you are—and I want somebody to talk to. You owe me something anyway for finding out he was lame."

"Do I? And what payment do you want?"

"The pleasure of your company for half an hour—I must be going by the end of that time. Here's a soft rock, sit down and say something!"

"Well, you *are* cool!" said Madge, drawing a long breath and staring at him; "it's refreshing to listen to you. What does your serene highness wish me to say?"

"Anything you please. I am sure all your remarks will be delightful!"

"I'm obliged to you! To begin, then, who are you?"

"A gentlemen by courtesy and the grace of God"

"I should never suspect you had any of that last about you! You have a name, haven't you? What is it?"

"A very pretty one—St. Leon."

"Stuff! that sounds too much like the hero of a three-volume novel. Are you sure it's not Robinson or Brown?"

"Thank goodness, yes!"

"And your name's really St. Leon?"

"It really is, incredible as it sounds."

"What else? People generally have two names."

"So they have! You won't faint when I tell you?"

"I'll try not to."

"It's Giacomo, then."

Madge whistled.

"Giacomo St. Leon! there's a nice name to talk about! Are you a foreigner?"

"Not to my knowledge; not if birth in a New England village and of a New England mother does not make me so."

"How did you have the misfortune to get such an outlandish name, then?"

"Because I chanced to possess a foreign father, who first opened his eyes on the banks of the Guadalquiver, and closed them on those of the Connecticut."

"Oh, that's the way, is it? You're a stranger here, of course?"

"Never set foot in Maryland until this morning."

"What brought you to Torwoodtown?"

"You never would guess."

"No, I'm not a Yankee. To escape the sheriff, perhaps."

"Not exactly! I'm in search of a wife."

"Indeed! You have just come to the right place,

then! Young ladies—such nice ones, too!—are as plentiful here as blackberries in season. For instance, there are three or four over there in one house."

"What a paradise that house must be. Who are they?"

"Torwood's the name—four Misses Torwood."

"I have heard the name before, I think. One came here recently, didn't she? A tall, dark girl—not bad looking?"

"Why, that's Edith; did you know her?"

"Slightly."

"Where?"

"I met her in Cuba, I think."

"Oh, it's the very same; she has just come from Cuba. I suppose you mean to call and see her?"

"It would only be a polite attention, wouldn't it? Do you think I had better?"

"Decidedly! it would be bad manners to stay away; and I hate bad manners. Call, by all means."

"It shall be as you say; but is it not like entering a lion's den? Not walking with one's eyes open into a bottomless gulf of danger? Four beautiful young ladies—just think of it! What is to become of me among them all?"

"Very true! It *is* a danger; and though you *might* withstand the rest—on the same principle that pigs *might* fly, though they're unlikely birds—you never could hold out against the youngest—never!"

"Is she so very nice, then?"

"Nice! That is a pretty word to apply to Madge Torwood! You might as well say the sun at noon—"

day, or a flash of lightning, or a bird of paradise, or any other great phenomena of nature, was nice, as that girl! I tell you sublime's the word when you talk of her! Beautiful, bewildering, charming, splendid, heavenly! "Oh!" cried Madge, in an ecstasy, giving little springs up and down on the rock, "the English language is not adequate to the task of describing her!"

The young gentleman lifted his handsome dark eyes in languid astonishment at this outburst.

"I have heard," he said, reflectively, "that one young lady never praises another, but I find I am mistaken. I shall certainly get my heart stove in by this beautiful, bewildering—what was the rest?—angel. Are the other two like her?"

"There never was anybody like her in the world—it couldn't be any more than there could be two suns—the idea is absurd! And now, terrible as the task is, I must tear myself away, for my time is limited."

"The very remark I was about to make myself," said the young man, pulling out a gold hunting-watch, and glancing at the hour; "but, first, am I not to know the name of the young lady whose delightful acquaintance I have the felicity to make this morning?"

"Oh, undoubtedly! My name," said Madge, with a polite little bow, "is Miss Smith—Miss Mary Ann Smith—everybody knows me; John Smith—you have heard of him—is my father. Good-morning, sir. When you fall in love with Madge Torwood, be kind enough to let me know."

The young gentleman with the foreign name

sprang lightly to his feet, and, doffing his hat, made her a second flourishing bow.

"I certainly shall. Good-morning, Miss Smith. I shall exist only in the recollection of this hour until I see you again. Come, Faust."

Faust rose and shook himself, his master shouldered his gun, and, whistling an air, sauntered leisurely over the hills, while the *bot-disant* Miss Smith, taking her horse by the bridle, led him in the direction of To-woodtown, thinking much more than was customary or quite prudent of the wonderfully handsome young stranger who accosted young ladies without the ceremony of an introduction, and talked to them in such free and easy strain.

Mr. McPherson was at home, and Madge cheered his solitary bachelor dinner by her company and spirited conversation. Rozinante's foot was attended to, and she had little difficulty after dinner in persuading the minister to return with her to the Hall.

"You haven't seen Edith, you know?" she urged; "and there's Lucy—the way that girl is flirting with the doctor is a sight to see. If you have one grain of sense in your head, you'll come."

"But Madame Torwood told me not to."

"Bother Madame Torwood! You came to the Towers before she ever knew there was such a place in existence, and will again, please the pigs! Get your hat and overcoat, there's a duck, and say no more about it."

The "duck" took out his snuff-box and helped himself to a huge pinch of snuff, and Madge, lean-

ing forward, began gesticulating furiously to some one outside.

"I say, there—Mr. Torwood! Cousin Angus, look here, will you; it's I."

A young man riding down the street, drew rein suddenly, and looked up at the window, Madge leaning out until there seemed considerable danger of her coming to grief by tumbling out head foremost, began shouting again.

"Just hold on one minute, will you! Are you going to Torwood Towers?"

"Yes," said Mr. Angus Torwood.

"Then hold on as I told you, and Mr. Mac and I will be with you in a pig's whisper."

Mr. Torwood, if not previously aware what precise period of time a pig's whisper might be, probably set it down as fifteen minutes, for in that time Miss Torwood and her clerical friend made their appearance, booted and spurred for the ride. Madge made the two gentlemen acquainted in a somewhat brusque fashion, and a brisk ride of full half an hour, brought the trio to their journey's end. As they ascended to the piazza steps Lucy came out, her pretty face flushed, her blue eyes sparkling, her whole face aglow with pleasurable excitement.

"Well, Lucy, what's the row?" Madge inquired, slapping her boot with her whip. "What streak of luck has happened lately? Nobody proposed this morning—did they?"

"Oh, Madge, Florence has come!"

"Has she? So we are all together, at last, like Brown's cows. Well, gentlemen, come along and let us see what this last Miss Torwood looks like."

CHAPTER VIII.

"THIS GENTLEMAN IS MY BETROTHED HUSBAND."

Lucy, leading the way, the three others followed into the drawing-room. The golden afternoon sunlight came in at the open casement, and basking like a tropical bird in its amber glory, Edith stood at one of them, her black satin dress falling in shining folds to the floor, a cincture of black velvet, dotted all over with little ruby and golden stars, spanning her small waist; a jacket of purple velvet, buttoned to the arched throat with silver buttons, tinkling like tiny bells whenever she moved; a rich cross of pearls, quaintly set in red-gold, lying on her breast; her exuberant dark, waving hair gathered in a modest knot behind, and with one or two scarlet geranium blossoms in velvet-green leaves reposing in the shining ripples. Stately, ladylike, picturesque, she looked, if not handsome; but in the broad, serene brow, the calm, earnest gray eyes, the thoughtful mouth, there was something that would long outlast all the pink-and-white wax-doll beauty in the world.

A specimen of that rose and snow beauty was there too. In a great gilded and carved arm-chair, a radiant vision sat—a youthful angel, whose azure silken robe displayed the outlines of a rather plump form; a great wax doll with pink cheeks, violet eyes, pale-gold hair, falling in a shower of rippling curls to her

waist ; a blonde belle, whose extremely low-necked and short-sleeved dress showed shoulders and throat, arched, plump, and snowy white arms and hands like Hebe's own.

A very full-blown beauty, indeed, who would have made two of any of the others in breadth, though scarcely as tall as Lucy ; the pink cheeks were as round as apples ; the delicate fingers, sparkling with rich rings, were all dimpled like a baby's ; and Edith's gold and crimson-starred cestus would not have clasped half way round the blue silk waist. It never would do to stigmatize a young lady as *fat*, therefore the most one can say is that Miss Florence Torwood, the golden and azure vision, was decidedly inclined to *embonpoint*. Beautiful she was, so young, so fresh, so blooming, but with a mere animal beauty, only skin deep. The forehead was white and smooth as snowy satin, but no intellect sat enthroned there ; narrow and low as it was, too, there was room enough for the words vanity and deceit. The violet eyes, rather small, rather dull generally, *could* sparkle sometimes, when she looked in the glass, for instance ; the nose was perfect—no artist could have formed anything straighter, nicer, or more characterless, out of putty or clay ; the mouth was like a rosebud ; the chin dimpled like the plump hands ; and over all fell the shimmering curls of gold, down to the rounded waist. Ear-drops of coral and gold sparkled in her ears ; gold bracelets adorned the lovely arms ; a brooch of cluster diamonds clasped her corsage, and her jeweled fingers toyed with the daintiest of fans—all pearl and swans'down.

Yes, Florence Torwood was a beauty, and a co-

quette—selfish, and terribly insipid; but beauty, like charity, covereth a multitude of sins, and looking like an angel, people generally, and young men particularly, were very willing to take her for one, and went raving mad about her at first sight.

But the two young men who came into her dazzling presence now were not of the kind to go raving mad about anything at very short notice. Mr. McPherson would have taken snuff before her as readily as he would before unlovely Madge, and Mr. Torwood's taste did not at all lie in the pink-and-white, cream-candy, and wax-doll line. Something not near so lovely to look at, a dark daughter of the earth, stood at the window, with a bright smile of welcome on her lips, and was ever so much more to his taste. But Lucy, smiling and radiant, was deep in the ceremony of introduction.

"Florence, here is Madge," said Lucy. "Would you know her?"

Miss Florence might have been a princess, so far as lymphatic ease of manner went; no princess could have been more unaffectedly nonchalant than she. A languid smile, a careless extension of the snowy hand, a faint kiss on one cheek, and a quiet stare—that was all.

"How do you do!" was her listless greeting. You have grown as tall as a grenadier; but I think I should have known you."

The violet eyes wandered away to the gentlemen; on Mr. McPherson they scarcely lingered a second, on Mr. Torwood they rested with a faint show of interest, as Lucy, mistress of the ceremonies, led him over and formally presented him. The beauty gra-

ciously bowed, and held out her taper fingers with an enchanting smile—a smile that had turned scores of heads before now, but which produced no such astounding motion on Cousin Angus, who was gone before it had faded, and was shaking hands with Edith at the window. Mr. McPherson's reception was hardly so genial; a nod of the golden head, and a little sour glance of disdain from the violet eyes, rewarded his awkward genuflection, and depressed him about as much as her cordiality had elated the other. He, too, retreated, and taking a seat near Madame Torwood, who sat enthroned in her easy-chair near the fire, eying the proceedings with frigid criticism, refreshed himself by a prolonged dose from his snuff-box. Madge, leaning over the carved and gilded chair, dipped her fingers in the shining ripples of her new sister's hair, and began trying her hand at polite small talk.

"When did you come?" she asked.

"About two hours ago I think," Florence answered, suppressing a yawn.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Do you like traveling?"

"No, I detest it; it's horrid!"

"Are you tired after your journey?"

"Dreadfully."

Here there was a blank, Madge's patience and small talk being exhausted together. Edith and Angus were chatting animatedly in a low tone, and in Spanish, at their window; Mr. McPherson, with one leg over the other, was staring at all in turn; and madam sat grave and grim, and very awful in

her stateliness, and watched the flickering wood fire. The hush that followed was oppressive, but it was suddenly and most unexpectedly broken by the minister.

"Ma'am," he said in his, most nasal twang, turning upon the mistress of Torwood, "I believe the will of the late Judge Torwood was to be read when his four daughters were assembled here for the first time. The four are here now, so what necessity is there for delay? It is only fair that they should know at once."

Lucy, Madge, even the listless Florence, looked vividly interested in this, and the pair at the window stopped talking abruptly, vividly interested too. The mystery about the will made them all the more anxious, and in the pause of expectation that followed you might have heard the beating of their hearts.

Madame Torwood's face, turned to the fire, had been averted; it was some minutes before she faced round; and when she did the dark red spots that only intense emotion of any kind could call there burned on her prominent cheek-bones.

"I have no objection," I she said, with a slight tremor of the steady voice; "the sooner or later it is the same to me. Shall I go and fetch it?"

"Haden't your son better be present, ma'am?"

"True; so he had. I wonder where he is?"

"Out in the shrubbery," said Edith; "I see him there now."

"I'll go after him," cried Madge, running from the room, down the piazza stairs, and into the shrubbery like a flash. Dr. Stuart was walking up and

down under the shady trees, with his ever-present meerschaum between his lips, and Madge shoved her arm through his, and began pulling him toward the house.

"Come along, Doctor Paul," was her cry; "they're waiting for you. The will is to be read, and it can't be done, it seems, unless you are there. Come in."

"Oh!" said Dr. Paul, opening his eyes, "has the other one come, then?"

"Florence? yes; didn't you know it? But then you're so abominably lazy, forever loafing and smoking in out-of-the-way corners, that you can't be expected to know anything."

"Is she pretty, Madge?"

"Pretty as she can be and live, only there's too much of her for my taste. She's as fat as a seal."

"Nonsense!" and the doctor laughed.

"It's true, I tell you; wait till you see; and she's as flat as skimmed milk after a thunder-storm; a great pink and white and blue and yellow doll; but I dare say you'll admire her. It would be just like your stupid sex to do it."

"You are very complimentary," the doctor said, still laughing, as he entered the drawing-room with Madge's arm still thrust through his.

Everybody stood and sat precisely as she had left them, and Madge led her companion up to the azure vision in the gilded chair.

"Miss Florence Torwood," said Madge, mimicking unconsciously the dulcet tone in which Lucy had introduced the other, "allow me to present my very dear friend, Dr. Paul Stuart, a compatriot of yours from New York."

To the astonishment of every one present the dull and lymphatic beauty fairly bounded out of her chair, and the red blood gushed in a fiery torrent to face, forehead, and neck, dyeing all crimson. Both surprise and intensest confusion shone in the wide open blue eyes and scarlet face, and the words she tried to utter died out in a vague murmur on her lips. All stared, as they very well might, but Dr. Stuart was as cool, and bland, and as innocently unconscious as if he were five years old instead of five-and-twenty. He was a great deal too polite even to look at the painfully confused face, and expressing in cool, conventional phrase his pleasure at making her acquaintance, bowed to Messrs. Torwood and McPherson, and retreated to a seat at a distant window.

Madge was staring in blankest bewilderment at Florence, who, still red to the roots of her hair, had subsided back to her seat; Lucy was the picture of surprise. Madam looked startled and suspicious, Angus was half smiling knowingly, and Edith's grave eyes looked calm astonishment. Mr. McPherson alone sat unmoved, and returned at once to the charge.

"We sent for you, Doctor," he began, "because the will is about to be read, and, as you are an interested party, it was necessary you should be present. If you will go and get it, ma'am, I will read it now."

Madame Torwood rose, but Madge cut in, "Law! what's the good of going for the will? It's a long, stupid rigmarole, I know—all wills are—and will set us every one to sleep before Mr. McPherson is half done drawing it out. All we want to know is

how papa left his property, and he can tell us that in a dozen words, without any more bother."

"So he can," said madam, nervously; "it will do as well. Be good enough to explain, in as few words as possible, the manner in which the property has been left."

Mr. McPherson took out his snuff-box, fortified himself with a copious pull of the refreshment it contained, cleared his throat, and began—

"You are all aware, I think, to commence with, that my late friend, the judge, the father of these young women, was a most peculiar and eccentric man."

"That's the preface," said Madge, in a loud whisper to Lucy, "and anything that requires a preface looks suspicious."

"Being eccentric," pursued Mr. McPherson, "he has made what some people might call an eccentric will—more like something one would read in a romance than anything of everyday occurrence. Judge Torwood died rich; besides this house and grounds, the market value of which I do not exactly know, he left bank stock to the value of one hundred thousand dollars. Knowing the nature of young women and men in general, he had a natural dread that they might fall a prey to fortune-hunters, and his money be squandered by idle coxcombs, if unconditionally divided between them; he, therefore, on his death-bed, left them not only provided with fortunes, but also"—Mr. McPherson paused provokingly to take another pinch—"but also with a husband."

There was a pause. The speaker produced a red

bandana handkerchief, and blew a sonorous blast, and Madge's black eyes flashed over on Dr. Stuart, who sat with his eyes downcast and his lips resolutely compressed, but with a smile of intense amusement lurking wickedly in both.

"With *a* husband, did you say, Mr. Mac?" demanded pert Madge. "Does that mean we are all four to marry the same man?"

"Your patience one moment, Miss Madge. In selecting a husband for one of his daughters, and a master for Torwood Towers, it was quite natural his thoughts should turn to his wife's son. I am not aware that he was personally acquainted—indeed, I am positive that he was not—but the young man's excellent reputation as a doctor and a man"—here Dr. Stuart made the minister a polite bow—"had doubtless, reached and influenced him. He, therefore, in his will has divided his bank stock into two equal parts, and to whichever of his four daughters becomes the wife of Dr. Stuart, Torwood Towers and fifty thousand dollars fall on her wedding day. The other fifty thousand is to be divided into four equal parts, one to go to his widow, the remaining three to his other three daughters. Such are the terms of the will."

Mr. McPherson ceased, and in the dead silence that followed, the faces in the room were a study. The red-hot spots on madam's cheek-bones burned like fire; the lurking roguish smile was deepening on Dr. Stuart's face, in spite of his most decorous efforts; Lucy's head was averted, but her eyes were drooping and her cheeks scarlet; Florence sat toying with her fan, her momentary confusion gone, and a

complacent look in her eyes that said plainly enough which of the four she thought was to be the successful one; the dark brow of Angus was contracted into a swarthy frown; Mr. McPherson himself sat perfectly stoical; and Edith's face was turned to the window and could not be seen, but one hand had grasped the window-sill in a grip so hard that her nails had sunk deep in the rosy palm. Her voice, it was, too, that first broke the silence, as, in a tone so changed that they hardly knew it, and without turning round, she asked:

"And suppose none of Judge Torwood's four daughters chooses to become the wife of Dr. Stuart—what then?"

"Then," said Mr. McPherson, peering at the tall, dark figure curiously over his spectacles, "Torwood Towers goes unconditionally to Dr. Stuart, in case he takes the name of Torwood; the fifty thousand dollars go to Madame Torwood, to be left to whomsoever she pleases at her death; and the other fifty thousand is to be equally shared between you four young women. It's rather an odd will, I allow, but then——"

Mr. McPherson paused, and filled up the hiatus by inhaling the largest pinch of snuff that ever was drawn up human nostrils.

Edith Torwood suddenly turned round from the window, with a face so changed they could scarcely know it, her brow dark as night, her cheeks ablaze, her eyes flashing flame. They rested for one fiery second, on Dr. Stuart, with a glance so full of bitter scorn and hatred that, had looks been lightning, would have blasted him in his seat. Then the fiery

gaze turned from son to mother, and in the same bitter, fierce, and unnatural tone in which she had spoken before, she said:

"My father is dead, and the dead should be respected; but I will say none but a fool or a madman could ever have made such a will. My father I never knew, but I believe him to have been neither; therefore the will is a forgery, or was prompted by some demon in human shape. Judge Torwood *never* would rob his daughters for a stranger he never saw!"

Madame Torwood arose, fiery as her step-daughter, and a wordy war seemed impending; but Dr. Stuart, with a grave dignity no one could assume better than he, interposed.

"Mother, restrain yourself; Miss Torwood certainly cannot mean you by the epithet she has used. If she can so far forget herself, your best answer will be silence."

"An out-and-out case of diamond cut diamond," whispered Madge to Lucy, who sat listening with a rather pale and startled face now. "It's the best fun I have had in a month of Sundays. Shouldn't I admire to see those two firebrands scratching each other's face!"

There are some people who, under the influence of strong emotion, attain a sort of grand beauty, brilliant, but short-lived. The slight figure of Edith seemed to dilate and grow tall in her keen sense of wrong, in her bitter resentment and fiery wrath. She turned back to the window, however, without another word, and Madame Torwood, with a sort of defiance in her face and tone, turned to Lucy.

"Miss Torwood, you have heard your dead father's last commands. Will you obey?"

Lucy's face grew painfully flushed one instant, and then whiter than before.

"My father's dying words are sacred," she said in a voice so low and tremulous that it could scarcely be heard. "I will obey."

"Good! And you, Miss Florence?" in the same defiant tone.

"I—I don't know, I'm sure," said Florence, looking scared and helpless beyond everything.

"You have no particular objection though?" said madam, rather contemptuously.

"No-o," very faintly, though.

"And you, Miss Margaret, what have you to say to your father's will?"

"Only this," said Madge, who was silently performing a little dance of ecstasy with a chair for a partner, "that I'll take the fifty thousand dollars and your son to-morrow if you like!"

Miss Florence, flimsy as were her faculties, must have possessed some feeble sense of the ludicrous, for she tittered audibly at this, and Dr. Stuart gave the speaker a sidelong glance under his eyelashes, and the suppressed smile came back.

The mistress of Torwood turned all to the dark figure, all crimson and black at the window.

"And now, Miss Edith Torwood," she said, derisively, "we await *your* answer."

Edith, for the last moment or two, had been gazing out with strange intentness at a figure coming up the avenue; doubt, surprise, recognition, delight, flashing one after another vividly over her face.

Now she turned round, her eyes like stars, her whole countenance bright with triumphant defiance.

"You shall have it!" she cried in a ringing voice; "wait one moment."

She made them a sweeping courtesy, the same triumphant smile on her lips and in her blazing eyes, and, with the light, elastic step peculiar to her, passed out of the room.

"Oh, isn't she a brick?" exclaimed Madge to her partner, the chair, still in suppressed ecstasy.

"Has the girl gone mad?" Madame Torwood asked, looking around.

"There's method in her madness, I think," said the quiet voice of her son! "and by Jove! she's not alone."

Not alone, certainly. A young man, and an eminently handsome one, in a green shooting-jacket and splendid top-boots, at the sight of whom Madge opened her eyes to the size of two full moons, walked, hat in hand, by her side, entering the room. She was leaning on his arm, proudly, triumphantly, and she paused with him half-way across the room. Dead silence fell; strong expectation thrilled every heart.

"You wanted my answer," she said, in the same ringing tone; "here it is! This gentleman is my betrothed husband, and when I leave Torwood Towers it shall be as his wife!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE HUT IN THE WOODS.

A SWELTERING July day, when a fiery sun had pulsated red and lurid in a lowering sky, and had deepened into an ominous twilight full of forebodings of a coming storm. The brassy sun had sunk out of sight in a west all black and blood-red; an awful hush was in the air, as if earth held its breath in awe, in dread of the wrath to come. The sea-gulls whirled round and round in circles, dipping their glancing wings in the black and glassy sea, and screaming shrilly their note of preparation for the storm.

Down dropped the night, and with it the storm. The bars of crimson and black streaking the western sky turned to a pall of inky gloom—lurid flashes of lightning, from what quarter of the heavens no man could tell, gleamed incessantly; one great drop of rain, then another and another, faster, thicker, heavier, and, with a hissing rush, the tempest burst in its might.

But while the rain fell and the lightning flashed, and the black night was dismal without, within Torwood Towers there were lights, and laughter, and music. Grim it looked, lifting its weather-beaten head into the darkness, but the drawing-room and dining-room windows were bright with illumina-

tions, and the sound of the piano, touched by fair fingers, could be heard in the pauses of the storm.

It was just the night to luxuriate in a pleasant room, with books, and music, and social chit-chat—a night the sturdiest man would not have cared to venture out; and yet, just as the rain ceased, a window opening on the piazza that ran around the second story was raised, and a slender figure, a female figure, shrouded in a long dark mantle, with the hood drawn far over its head, stepped out. For a moment or two it stood quite still, with one shrouded arm extended to feel if it still rained, and then, as if satisfied, hastened along to the piazza stairs, descended, and walked rapidly down the shrubbery toward the sea-shore. It was a strange night for any one to be out, particularly any one from Torwood Towers, where even the servants, gathered together, in the immense kitchen, were enjoying a banjo breakdown in defiance of wind and weather.

An unspeakably miserable night it was still, though the rain had almost ceased, for the trees under which the hooded figure walked were dripping and clammy, the path was drenched, the grass soaking, and the night air sodden and oppressive with moisture. The wind blew raw and bleak, and the surf breaking on the low sand hills, had a moaning in its dull roar that made one shiver to listen to, telling, as it did, of shipwreck and death. The blackness of the night was illumined above by the ghastly blue phosphorescent glare of the lightning still flashing, and by this unearthly light the figure made its way down the storm-beaten shrubbery, and struck

off into a side-path leading across some lonesome fields into the black cedar woods. In sunny days lazy cows chewed the cud in these fields, and stared vacantly at stray plowboys, almost the only creature that ever took that lonely short cut; but the cows were huddled under the trees now, and the figure, slipping and stumbling, made her way across unseen even by them. Into the rough, straggling path the cows and the plowboys had made with their clumsy feet, the figure went, and in the gloom of the dismal cedar woods, appeared like a dark evil spirit on its way to Erebus.

By instinct, more than sight, it seemed to make its way for nearly a quarter of a mile, and then suddenly across the blackness of the path a stream of red light shone. No ghastly flame of lightning this, but the broad, lurid light of fire and candle shining from the window of a hut on the roadside.

Of all wretched huts, it was the most wretched and forlorn—a miserable affair of bark and rotten boards, gaping wide apart, and letting the light out, with an excuse for a window, where only one pane was glass, and the other apertures, where glass should have been, stuffed with rags and old hats. No cabin, no wigwam in the black depths of some primeval forest could have been lonelier or more wretchedly forsaken than that; but the shrouded figure hastened toward it, and looked eagerly through its one-paned window.

The view was a little odd, but not at all startling. On the rudest of hearths a great fire of pine logs blazed, brilliantly lighting up the hut and its belongings. Scanty belongings they were; two rickety

chairs, one or two stools, a rough table, a dresser with a few articles of crockery, and a rough trundle-bed in a corner, that was all. Its inhabitants were as scant as its furniture—a huge, overgrown cat sat blinking stupidly at the fire, and, bending over a saucepan standing on the red coals, was a woman stirring its contents. Presently she stood up, and in the firelight she loomed to an almost colossal height—nearly six feet. She might have been one of Macbeth's witches watching her unholy caldron, she looked so weird and unearthly, with her vast height, her fantastic dress, a short crimson skirt, an old black silk shawl, and the gayest of gay cotton handkerchiefs twisted turbanwise round her head.

The woman was a mulatto, but in her straight regular features, her broad forehead, and flashing black eyes, there was a sort of wild, gipsyish beauty, and much intelligence still lingering. A close observer might have noticed a certain wandering restlessness in those bright, dark eyes, betokening an unbalanced mind, and she muttered to herself as she stared vacantly at the fire. Her age might have been fifty, and her profuse, coarse black hair was thickly streaked with gray; but, hale, strong, and upright, she looked good for the wear and tear of another half-century.

Sitting down on one of the stools, she clasped both her knees with her arms, and, still staring at the fire and muttering to herself, was evidently waiting for the mess in the saucepan to be cooked, when there came a distinct rap on the one window-pane.

The woman's sense of hearing was acute. She started up instantly, and looked in the direction of

the sound. The rap was repeated, and she crossed the room in long strides, and looked out.

"Who is there?" she asked, in a voice deep as a man's but not unpleasant.

"It is I, Huldah," said a girlish voice impatiently.

"You know me; open the door."

Huldah bent her towering figure, and looked at the face, from which the hood had fallen back, in the greatest astonishment.

"My conscience! If it's not her, herself! What can have brought her here, all alone, this time o' night, and *such* a night, too! Come in, child—come in. Who'd ever thought of seeing you at this hour?"

She opened the door of the hut while speaking, and the girl came in, crossed over to the fire, with a shiver, and sank down on a stool, wearily and in silence. The shrouding cloak dropped damp off her slender shoulders on the floor, and the face on which the ruddy firelight shone looked pale and fretted, careworn and anxious.

Huldah bolted the door again, and, sitting on another stool opposite, looked at her with eyes in which love and solicitude shone.

"What's gone wrong, honey?" she asked. "Something must, to fetch you here to-night. What is it?"

"Everything," the girl testily said; "nothing's going right. I was here last night, but the place was all dark and shut up. Where were you?"

"Over in Torwoodtown, honey. There was a party there, and the fools wanted their future told. I thought you was some of them coming to-night, for it's always in the dark they *do* come. If I'd known you wanted me, I'd have gone to the house,"

"No, you wouldn't," said her visitor, peevishly; "I don't want you to be coming to the house. You frightened me enough the other night, and I don't want you to come back again."

"Lor', honey! How did I frighten you?"

"You know well enough—the night you were sitting at the gate. I can't help showing in my face that I know you, and I don't want you to come any more."

"Very well, honey," said Huldah, meekly. "I only wanted to see the new madam, when you came along, with all the other young ladies and gentlemen. Was one of them the madam's son?"

"Yes; the tall one with the fair hair. Take a good look at him the next time you see him, Huldah, for I'm going to be his wife."

"Lor', child! You don't mean it."

"I *do* mean it. The will has been read."

Huldah instantly grew vividly interested.

"Read! When? Where? What is in it?"

"A great deal of injustice and romantic rubbish. I was terribly angry when I heard it first; but I am, just as well satisfied now. The will was made, not by Judge Torwood, but by Judge Torwood's last wife, and gives nearly everything to her son."

"To her son!" Huldah repeated in bewilderment.

"Yes; Mr. McPherson, the minister, told us all about it the night before last, for the first time, and nearly all falls to him, on condition that he marries one of us. Marries one of us—do you understand? Now, Huldah, I mean that he shall marry me!"

"But there is——"

"There is nobody or nothing that shall stand in my way. I tell you I shall marry him!"

"Do you like him?" Huldah asked, looking at her curiously.

"Like him!" repeated the girl, in tones of shrill scorn, her eyes flashing fiercer flames than the hot firelight. "I tell you I hate and despise him more than any other creature on God's earth. If he had the spirit of a dog, much less that of a gentleman, do you think he would take the property of four orphan girls and keep it, base, sordid hound that he is, because, forsooth, that his mother was their father's wife, and could fool him as she pleased? Like him!" she reiterated, her voice growing piercing in its angry shrillness. "I tell you, Huldah Black, the night before last, when I heard it first, I could have sprung at his throat, as he sat there, smiling insolently, and torn it out!"

The mulatto woman looked at her, the latent fire in her own eyes beginning to blaze. The girl had been pale enough when she entered, but her cheeks now were rosy flame. She clenched her small hand, and set her teeth involuntarily, as she thought of the man she hated, the fire in her angry eyes growing more fiercely bright.

"It is the greatest injustice that ever was done. I do not believe any Christian court of law would recognize such a will; but law and justice are not always the same—I know that; and this woman is deep—deep, designing, and crafty. I hate her as well as her mean, spiritless son. But in open warfare I am no match for the pair of them, so I must have recourse to stratagem. I thought it all over yester-

day, and laid my plans as I tell you. If you help me, I shall marry this Doctor Stuart, and reign mistress of Torwood!"

"You will marry the man you hate?"

"Huldah, don't be a fool!" Huldah's visitor pettishly cried. "What do you know about such things? Every day, for money, girls marry men they hate, and why not I? I want to be rich and honored. I want to travel and see the world. I want—oh, millions of things that only money can procure; and so you must help me in what I am going to do."

"My darling," the mulatto woman tenderly said, "you know I would die for you."

"You are a good creature, Huldah," said the girl, softening, "and I am too cross with you; but my dismal walk has upset me, and I grow wild every time I think of that horrible will. When I am rich, *you* shall not be forgotten—remember that."

"Honey, what is it you want me to do?"

"Oh, lots of things. I have been plotting and plotting, until my poor head is ready to split. It is not going to be an easy task, for I must work with a velvet mask on my face and kid gloves on my hands; in other words I am acting a character not my own every day, and I must keep it up. They don't suspect me. Of the four sisters of Torwood, I fancy I am the one least likely to be suspected; I have taken good care of that. But plotting evil is new to me, and, Huldah, it tires me to death."

She sighed heavily, and looked at the fire again, with eyes from which all the flame and sparkle had vanished.

Huldah laid her hard brown hand with a tender

touch on the listless little ones folded wearily in the girl's lap.

"Only tell me what you want me to do, child, and don't look so pale. You know I love nobody in the world but you."

"Thank you, Huldah. I must tell you very fast, for I want to get back before I am missed, and it is a wretched night. Just see that lightning!"

She shivered, and drew closer to her companion. Huldah patted the hand she held, soothingly, and still kept her dark eyes fixed on the young girl's pale face.

"How did you manage to get out without their knowing it, now, honey?"

"Oh, I pleaded a headache, and begged they would not disturb me for two or three hours, and they won't. They think I am sleeping the sleep of the just at this present moment, and they are enjoying themselves with three young men in the drawing-room. If they only knew what I am about!"

She broke into a short laugh at the notion, but checked it instantly, and frowned at herself.

"Bah! this fooling won't do, and the hours are passing. Half-past nine," she said, pulling out a toy of a watch, "and I must be back at ten, lest any one of my three tender sisters *should* take it into her head to come to my room and see about me. Now, listen, Huldah!"

The two drew close together, and for about ten minutes talked in whispers, as if they feared the cat or the fire might hear and tell. Then the girl arose, and picked up her cloak.

"Remember all I have said, Huldah, and do as I

tell you, and everything will go right. Lightning still! How I hate the thought of going back over that dismal road! Are you ready to come with me? Make haste!"

Huldah seized a coarse blanket shawl lying on the bed, drew it around her tall form, and, opening the door, led the way out.

The night was as drear and dismal as ever, the wind as raw, the lightning as vivid, and the hut as lonely. It was no hour or place for conversation, and silently they went on, the girl clinging to her companion's shawl. As ten pealed from the Hall clock in Torwood Towers, the twain stood at the foot of the piazza steps.

"How will you get in?" Huldah asked, looking at the lights streaming from the kitchen, hall, and drawing-room windows.

"Through my chamber window; it opens on the piazza. Good-night, dear, kind, good Huldah. Only do as I tell you, and I shall be mistress here!"

"I will do everything you tell me, my darling," the giantess said, kissing lovingly the little hand extended to her. "You know I would die for you."

The girl ran lightly up the stairs, flew along the piazza, and paused at the window from which, two hours before, she had issued. There was a flash of lightning. Huldah, standing below, like a tall black ghost, saw a white hand wave to her in its blue glare, and then the form at the window vanished. With it, went the blue light, and all was blackness again. The very night seemed to feel that something evil had passed.

CHAPTER X.

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

ONCE upon a time, when "gods and goddesses, without skirts or bodices," reigned in Olympus, there was a certain one of this number—Achilles, I think they called him—who, having been dipped when an infant in the river Styx, was rendered thereby invulnerable forever after, except in the heel by which his mother had held him while ducking him. Madame Torwood was something like Achilles—invulnerable at all points but one, and that one weak point did not lie in her heel but in her heart. That organ was iron-clad to all the world but one, that one her son Paul—*there* an arrow could enter, there was the one weak place in her strong masculine nature.

Dr. Paul, leaning against the mantel one evening, the second after the arrival of Florence, and looking down at his lady mother placidly crocheting in her arm-chair, startled her by suddenly saying—

"Mother, I wish you would give a dinner party."

Down went the crochet, wide open flew madam's eyes.

"My dear Paul!"

"My dear mother!"

"Give a dinner party? What nonsense! I'll do no such thing!"

"Oh, yes, you will! to please me, you know—it's a whim I have."

"I don't care about your whims! I won't do it. Dinner party, indeed! Who is to eat it?"

"A good many people—I have the list all made out, and all the *creme de la creme* of Torwoodtown; so don't look so shocked. What day will it be?"

"Stuff and nonsense! What put this notion in your head?"

"The 'Spirit of Hospitality.' This is Monday. Let me see—suppose we say Thursday."

"Now, Paul!"—expostulatory.

"Everything can be ready in that time, new dresses for the young ladies included, if they want them. My dear mamma, don't make that dismal face if you can help it—it entirely spoils your good looks, and Dr. Leach told me yesterday you were a fine-looking woman."

Madam relaxed into a smile—no such monster as a woman insensible to flattery ever yet existed.

"Dr. Leach is a simpleton, and Dr. Stuart is another. What do you want this dinner party for, Paul? It is something more than a mere whim, I'm sure."

"So it is. Well, I'll tell you. The good people of Torwoodtown, it appears, are dying to know what the new Miss Torwoods are like, and it is only a common Christian act to keep them from expiring of curiosity. Besides, the world will think you intend keeping them shut up like nuns in cells. Oh, you must give the dinner party."

That *must*, like the fiat of a king, decided it. Invitations were issued for the following Thursday to

the most exclusive of Torwoodtown *élite*, and the most exclusive of Torwoodtown *élite* were only too happy to accept. Mr. and Mrs. Lawyer Graves and the three Misses Graves sent a perfumed note of acceptance; so did Dr. Leach, so did the Rev. Adonis Breeze, the Episcopal clergyman; so did Mr. and Mrs. Emory, who lived in a lovely villa, and had a house in Baltimore for the winter, and who had more money than they knew what to do with; so did young Mr. Moreen, whose father was a senator, and who came to Torwoodtown every season to fish, and shoot, and smoke cigars, and make eyes at the pretty girls; so did the Rev. Mr. McPherson, so did Mr. Angus Torwood, so did Mr. Giacomo St. Leon; and all who were not invited, and hoped to have been, were nearly frantic with jealousy. Somebody else was nearly frantic too—old Aunt Chloe, the cook, who for thirty years and upward had never heard of a dinner party at Torwood Towers. But here Lucy came to the rescue.

"Never mind, auntie," she said, with her good-natured little laugh, "you attend to your hares, and turkeys, and chickens, and roast beef, and the rest of the heavy artillery, and I will devote myself to the jellies, and custards, and pastry, and blanc-mange. Don't fret—between us it will be a success, never fear."

So pretty Lucy, down in the kitchen region, in a dainty calico wrapper, her sleeves rolled up over the dimpled elbows, her pink cheeks flushed scarlet, beat eggs, and whipped jellies, and made ice-cream, and was entirely invisible up-stairs. The three younger Misses Torwood were of very little use in these days

of preparation. Edith played Mendelssohn and Beethoven's grandest arias in a way that would have sent those composers themselves into ecstatic rapture could they have heard her. The parlor organ whereupon Judge Torwood's second wife used to play during the few brief years she spent at the Towers, and which had lain in the library unused ever since, had been repaired, and occupied a corner of the drawing-room now, and wonderful were the melodies the Creole girl's fingers drew from its old keys. Florence lounged in easy-chairs, or lolled on sofas all day long, yawning over novels, or eating candies, of which she generally kept a peck or so about her for daily consumption, or lisping milk-and-water small talk to her nearest neighbor. And, Madge rode over the country, and sailed over the sea, and was here and there and everywhere at once, making noise and commotion and banging doors wherever she went.

There were visitors too, at the Towers—Angus Torwood, Giacomo St. Leon, and the Rev. Alexander McPherson vied with each other in their frequency and length of their visits, and Dr. Stuart was bland as oil with all three, and his mother frowned silent disapproval from her throne in the chimney corner. Between that dignified lady and her three young step-daughters a sort of armed neutrality existed, liable to break out into open warfare at any moment. For Lucy, whom nobody could by any possibility dislike, her feelings were half liking, half contempt; for Edith, ever since the reading of the will and the startling explanation that wound it up, she had conceived an almost positive hatred;

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Florence she despised too much to hate ; and Madge, mad and boisterous, she shrank from with sensitive horror and detestation.

Mr. St. Leon, Edith's handsome *fancé*, she treated with a freezing civility that was altogether thrown away on that eminently nonchalant young gentleman, who cared no more for her or her grand airs than he did for the barking of his great Newfoundland Faust. Perhaps she would have hated him outright, with, good, honest, open hatred, as she did Edith, only the young man happened to be one of those darlings of nature, whom it is simply impossible to dislike. He made very little effort to please any one and yet he *did* please ; you liked him without knowing why, and laughed at his jokes, and let him wind you round his finger without wishing to resist, almost without knowing you *were* following his lead. It might have been his handsome face—for a handsome face, on a man or woman, has a power that never fails ; it might have been his very free-and-easy way of making himself at home with every one, and calling people by their Christian name ten minutes after being introduced to them. Whatever it was, the charm existed, subtle and irresistible ; and Madame Torwood, exacting and exclusive, smiled upon one she felt it her bounden duty to detest. She was by no means sorry Edith was his betrothed—*she* never would have done for her darling Paul's wife, though any of the other three might ; the Creole girl was altogether too high-stepping—too much like herself, inclined to strike fire and flash at a moment's notice.

"It's all right," madam said, shrugging her shoul-

der's; "nothing is bad but might be worse! I am very glad there is not the slightest chance of that disagreeable creature ever being Paul's wife."

So, while some worked and some played, and the world went well with both, old Father Time grimly tramped on his course, and brought on the eventful Thursday afternoon.

The dining-room of Torwood Towers had not come out in such resplendent array within the memory of the oldest inhabitants; and all the servants had stolen up, and, standing breathless in the doorway, gaped in admiring awe around. Its hangings of crimson and gold flashed back the July sunlight; its pictures of fruit, of deer in the cool green heart of primeval woods, of huntsmen in pink and scarlet chasing them with horse and hound; its carved sideboard of golden-grained mahogany, laden with silver, cut-glass, and a long array of wine bottles in ice; its great dining-table luxuriously spread with still more cut glass and antique silver, and with a huge old wassail bowl mounted in the middle, that would have held punch for a small regiment, and was resplendent and dazzling to look at.

The drawing-room, too, was out in its gayest glories of curtain, carpet, and easy-chair, with a portrait of the late lamented judge over the mantel, looking gravely down on all. And there in her easy-chair, with more of the dowager duchess air than ever, Madame Torwood sat, dressed in black velvet and crape, a diamond breastpin flashing like another sun on her icy bosom, and a most marvelous Parisian combination of lace and ribbons on her very erect head. There, too, Lucy was, with breathing timent

last, very simply dressed in black silk, with soft quillings of lace round the throat, wide sleeves full and flowing, finished with undersleeves of misty illusion, with no ornaments but a brooch of gold and jet, not even a flower in the pale golden hair. Yet somehow she managed to look elegant, ladylike, and pretty as a picture in Quakeress attire ; and madam had glanced at her with a critical eye, and graciously said, " You look very well, indeed, my dear ;" and her son had indorsed the sentiment by a look that made Lucy's color deepen preceptibly.

There was Madge, too, in black barege, low-necked and short-sleeved, without adornment of any kind, dancing in and out, her eyes like black stars, her cheeks rosy flame in her impatience for the coming of the guests.

Dr. Stuart was on the piazza with Sancho and his meerscham pipe, taking it all very easy, but with one eye and both ears aimed at the drawing-room, nevertheless.

Edith and Florence had not yet made their appearance ; the former was walking up and down her room listening for the gallop of a certain horse, the sound of a certain voice, that was to bring her down-stairs ; and Florence, in the next room, was under the hands of Mademoiselle Ffine, the French maid.

It was transport, mademoiselle said, to have anybody so exceeding lovely as Miss Florence to dress ; and she curled the golden hair and twined it in and out with rosebuds and verbenas, and untied ribbons and clasped bracelets all in an ecstasy of admiring enthusiasm. No wonder, ten minutes after she ceased, a vision floated down to the drawing-room

more bewildering than anything ever seen out of fairyland or a novel. A vision in translucent white, so filmy and floating that it waved round her like a cloud of mist ; pale oriental pearls glowing with dewy luster on the lovely uncovered neck, on the rounded snow-white arms, and clasping, like congealed moonrays, the flowers in her hair. Down over all fell the shimmering curls, like an amber veil, to the round plump waist, clasped by a dainty black belt, flashing with seed pearls, and the blue eyes had never been so starry, nor the rose-bloom so delicately deep on the round cheeks before. The jeweled fingers toyed with a jeweled fan, and from the toe of her slippered foot to the crown of her golden head, the silver shining vision was dazzling to look at. Pretty girls were coming that day, but she would be among them a sun among stars. Lucy's quiet prettiness paled and waned into nothingness the moment she appeared, and even madam's cold eyes were betrayed into one flash of involuntary admiration. Dr. Stuart took the amber mouthpiece of his pipe from between his lips and gazed on her as on a picture, so lovely that you feared to breathe lest it vanish altogether.

"Oh, isn't she splendid?" Madge whispered in his ear. "She is beautiful enough to be put under a glass-case and taken round the country for a show. How's your heart—stove in?"

"Haven't the faintest shadow of such a thing about me. I never saw anything so lovely in my life."

"I declare it's a shame!" Madge resentfully broke out, struck with sudden indignation. "What busi-

ness had she monopolizing beauty enough for a dozen, and Edith and Lucy, not to speak of myself, the most deserving of all, to be stigmatized at the best as 'not bad-looking.' It's a crying shame, and I feel slighted by nature—I do so!"

"My dear Madge, don't torment yourself! You are pretty enough for anything, and so is Lucy, and even Edith——"

He stopped suddenly—a horseman was riding leisurely down the bridle-path, and there was a rustle and flutter, and a faint odor of delicate perfume behind him. Miss Edith, in black crape, a foreign-looking velvet jacket, its flowing sleeves slashed to the elbow with white satin, the gold chain and cross set with rubies in her breast, and scarlet geranium-blossoms in her shining dark hair, was standing in the doorway, dark and haughty, and of marble to him, but with eyes that shone with lustrous light for the slow horseman riding so much at his ease down hill. Dr. Stuart rose up and offered his seat with a courteous bow; but from him the scornful young sultana would not even accept a chair.

"Thank you, no!" she said, sweeping past him, her long lashes drooping coldly over her proud eyes; and leaning lightly against a pillar, she toyed with the clusters of sweetbrier blossoms growing round it, and waited for the horseman to come up.

Slapping his boots with his riding whip, and whistling a tune, he sauntered up the steps in his own easy fashion, and took off his hat to the ladies.

"Good afternoon, Edith—good afternoon, Doctor. Ah! Miss Smith, you here; how do you do?"

"Salubrious, thank you," Madge said, with grav-

ity, and Edith looked from one to the other, puzzled.

"Why do you call her Miss Smith, Giacomo? I have heard you do it before, and she answers as if it were her name."

Mr. St. Leon, slapping his boot still, gave Madge a sidelong glance from his dark eyes, as he observed, "I have had the pleasure of meeting the young lady before I came here at all, and her name was Miss Smith then—at least she told me so, and I never doubt a lady's word. Am I first? Very unfashionable; but the cigars over there at the hotel are enough to kill a horse, so I only smoked half a dozen or so, and then was obliged to leave off, and come here. I saw Torwood and McPherson on my way. Ah! there they are jogging along together now. I suppose I had better go in and pay my respects to madam."

Resigning his whip and his whistling, he strolled in with Edith, and Dr. Stuart looked after them with that doubtful smile of his, that puzzled you for its meaning. Looking down again, he found Madge's black eyes staring at him with curious intentness.

"Well?" he said, the smile deepening on his face.

"What makes you look so?" demanded blunt Madge. "I hate that queer laugh of yours, when there's nothing in the world to grin at. I should like to know what you see so funny about Jackeymo St. Leon and our Edith."

"My dear little termagant, how do you know I was laughing at them?"

"Because I do! I can see as far into a millstone

as the man that made it! What's more, Dr. Paul Stuart," with a flash of her black eyes that reminded him of Edith, "I know what you are thinking of!"

"Paul and Madge Torwood are among the prophets! Out with it, my little Witch of Endor."

Madge, with her great eyes fixed piercingly on his face, was wonderfully grave for her. "Dr. Stuart, look here," she said abruptly, "you knew Florence before you saw her here."

"Did I?"

"You know you did! How was it?"

"Ask Florence."

"I have, dozens of times."

"And what did she say?" said Dr. Stuart, with the smile Madge disliked in his face again.

"Turned as red as a beet, and told lies—said she never saw you or heard of you before the other day when the will was read. I hate people that won't tell the truth!"

"The truth should not always be told, my dear," he said.

Madge gave him an angry flash of the eye that reminded him more and more of her Creole sister; but he only laughed good-naturedly, and ran downstairs to meet Messrs. McPherson and Torwood.

Madge, with some thoughts of her own not very pleasant shadowing her bright face, went into the drawing-room, where Edith was at the piano singing some Spanish song St. Leon liked, as only Edith could sing; where Lucy, in a window recess, never idle, was bending over embroidery, and where Florence sat beside St. Leon on the sofa, and looked languidly at a book of prints he had brought to

her. A strikingly handsome pair they made, and very well content they looked. The shade darkened more and more on Madge's face, and going over to the piano she stood beside Edith, and watched her while she sang.

And now the other guests were coming, and Edith left the piano. St. Leon made room for her on the sofa, but she only smiled, and went over to Cousin Angus, while Mr. McPherson devoted himself to Madge, and Dr. Stuart sought out Lucy in her window, and began taking private lessons in embroidery, and in something else, his mother hoped. One by one the carriages drove over the hill, and Madame Torwood, stately and stiff, was welcoming her guests until the drawing-room was filled and all had arrived. The sisters of Torwood were playing the agreeable to the *élite* of Torwoodtown—Lucy, very sweetly; Edith, like a princess royal among her subjects; Florence, with a flow of listless tittle-tattle, chiefly about the weather: and Madge, coming out of her crossness, had something to say to every one. On these occasions the half hour before dinner is generally fearfully stupid, and though all were doing their best to talk and be exceedingly at ease, no one was sorry when dinner was announced.

Madame Torwood was led in by the Rev. Adonis Breeze, who, like half the other young men present, was desperately smitten with Florence; her son bore on his arm Mrs. Lawyer Graves. Mr. Lawyer Graves took Miss Torwood, Edith leaned on the arm of Cousin Angus, Florence, followed with St. Leon, and Madge stepped along with

young Mr. Moreen, whom she had fascinated in five minutes by her black eyes and spirited style of conversation. Of course the dinner was like all other dinners—small talk and clattering knives and rattling forks, glassware clashing with the usual amount of laughing, whispering, and flirting.

Madge, to whom it was all new, was in a high state of rapturous excitement; but while she kept one ear devoted to the service of Mr. Moreen, the other and both eyes were aimed at Giacomo St. Leon and Miss Florence. St. Leon was telling wonderful stories of hunting buffalo out West, of a trip he had made in a yacht up the Mediterranean, of a winter spent in Constantinople, and of life among the dark-eyed *senoritas* of Havana; but there were moments of intermission when he found time to lower his voice, and talk of other things to Florence.

Some one else was on the alert, too—Dr. Stuart found time to look that way now and then, and exchange glances with Madge, that said plainly as words, "I see what is coming, and so do you."

CHAPTER XI.

THE MINISTER'S THREE REASONS.

DINNER was over, and they were all back in the drawing-room. Music and singing followed. Edith held every one spell-bound while her magic fingers swept the keys—even the admirers of Florence forgot her for the time being, and were entranced like the rest. Other young ladies played and sang, most of them at that "dear, sweet, handsome love of a man," Mr. St. Leon; but their exhibitions were very jingly and schoolgirlish after Edith Torwood, and failed to make the slightest impression on that eminently handsome young gentleman. The papas and mammas played cards and sipped coffee; and old Time, mowing down his ten thousands somewhere, only spread roses at Torwood Towers, until the hour for breaking up came.

Then there was hand-shaking and leave-taking, and in the light of the young July moon carriage after carriage rolled away, and the banquet hall was deserted.

Three of the guests lingered, the three who came first, and the night being lovely, and the drawing-room warm, they strolled out with the young ladies on the piazza. Lucy, Edith, Florence, and Madge went down into the grounds, and Messrs. St. Leon and Torwood went with them. Dr. Stuart and the

Rev. Alexander McPherson walked up and down the piazza, arm and arm, the former inveterate smoker with a cigar in his lips, and the later looking at the group below, and taking thoughtful pinches of snuff.

"Very pretty tableau," Dr. Stuart said, knocking off the ashes of his cigar with his little finger. "Good scenery, nice moonlight, lovely women, and brave men! Would I were an artist!"

"What do you think of that good-looking young man with the foreign name?" Mr. McPherson asked.

"I think with you, that he is a good-looking young man."

"Nothing more?"

"Yes, that the second Miss Torwood is desperately, hopelessly, and irretrievably in love with him."

Mr. McPherson looked meditative.

"I tell you what, Stuart, she's a fine girl that—plucky and spirited, as girls ought to be. Nothing flat or insipid about her, as there is about—but comparisons are odious; I won't say it."

"I'll say it for you, then—as there is about Lucy and Florence. Yes; whoever marries Miss Edith will find the gray mare in his stable the better horse. How she did fire up about that will, eh?"

"She had a right to."

"And her entrance with our good-looking friend down there was quite theatrical; no actress on the stage could have done it better. The scene couldn't have been better got up at any price."

"Dr. Stuart," Mr. McPherson gravely said, "I don't like your tone in speaking of that young lady. She's a fine girl, high mettled, and a trifle proud, but

with the ring of the right sort about her. It's a great pity——" he stopped abruptly.

"What's a pity?"

"That she should throw herself away on that fop down there, who isn't worthy to tie the latch of her shoe."

"My dear fellow," said Dr. Stuart, puffing away vigorously, "don't you know it is not always your fine girls that have lots of sense on these subjects. Women are quite as much slaves of their eyes as men, and what matters that fellow's empty head so long as it is fronted by a handsome face?"

"It's a great pity, a great pity! she will never be happy with him. Miss Florence would suit him far better."

Dr. Stuart laughed.

"His own opinion, precisely, my friend! By the way, what a lovely creature she is—isn't she?"

"Very pretty, indeed, and just the wife for Mr. St. Leon."

"Ah! I don't know about that! I think I have a prior claim there."

"You? Humph! that reminds me I quite forgot to ask you where you ever met her before?"

"How do you know I have had that pleasure?"

"For the simple reason that young ladies do not generally blush scarlet at sight of an entire stranger. You did not meet Miss Florence Torwood four days ago for the first time. Don't tell me if you have the least objection; but don't tell white lies in denying the fact."

Some ludicrous recollection seemed to flash on the young doctor, for, raking his cigar between his

finger and thumb, he broke into an immoderate fit of laughter. Mr. McPherson eyed him stoically.

"I thought so. Are you going to tell me about it?"

"Couldn't possibly!" said Dr. Stuart, still laughing; "she mightn't like it. But, seriously now, my dear fellow, as I have to marry one of these blooming sisters, why should I not select the most blooming of the lot? I could not find a prettier wife on this hemisphere than our belle blonde, Florence—why should I not take her."

"For three simple reasons."

"Name them."

"First, because she would not have you! She likes the little finger of that handsome imbecile down there better than your whole body."

"Good! I don't set up for a beauty. What's the next?"

"You wouldn't have her if she were ten times as beautiful, and hung with diamonds from head to foot."

"My dear fellow—" half laughing, half expostulatory, but Mr. McPherson, rapping the ground with his cane, cut emphatically in:

"I tell you you would not, and you know it. If ever you marry one of these sisters, Florence is not the one. Edith would suit you far better."

"My dear McPherson, what are you thinking of? Miss Edith would not touch me with a pair of tongs. Besides, she's infatuated about St. Leon, adores the ground he walks on, et cetera! What a pity you and I are not good-looking—eh?" with a careless laugh.

"There's Lucy, then," suggested the minister.

"So she is—as sweet as maple sugar at that. But I thought you were a little tender there—had a prior claim, or something."

"Never mind; I'll forego my claim in your favor; or if she won't do, take Madge. Capital girl is Madge, though rather given to bounce."

"Yes, and I don't like bouncing wives. It's going to be a hard matter to choose, and I have only six months to work in. I think I'll consult Cousin Angus on the subject."

"I don't think you will, unless it's on the subject of privately assassinating Mr. St. Leon. He would assist you to do that, with the greatest pleasure."

"My dear McPherson, what a penetrating fellow you are! Jealousy is a green-eyed lobster, as I heard Madge say the other day; and Cousin Angus likes Cousin Edith a trifle too well to have much love left for her betrothed."

"A fact of which she is entirely ignorant! Wheels within wheels; and business is getting complicated," said Mr. McPherson.

"The skein has run smoothly hitherto, but the tangle is at hand, and when it comes won't there be an uproar!"

"When what comes?"

"Never mind; I flatter myself I have a knack of looking into futurity—

" 'Tis the evening of life gives me mystical lore,
And coming events cast their shadows before."

"The shadows are lengthening fast—the events are close at hand."





"I don't understand."

"I can't help that. Suppose we go down and join them. I begin to feel jealous."

"I am going to join my pony and go home. Good night, doctor. When you make up your mind which to marry let me know."

He went down the piazza stairs in his usual slouching fashion, and joined the group on the lawn. Dr. Stuart, leaning over the railing, watched them—watched the four sisters, fair Lucy, dark Madge, fickle Florence, and haughty Edith, and the old doubtful smile was back on his face again.

"Yes," was his thought, "if I ever marry it shall be one of the sisters of Torwood, and I think—I think I know which one it will be."

CHAPTER XII.

MYSTERY.

The July sun glimmered redly across the broad face of the bay as it set in the threatening sky, where black sullen clouds lowered, ominous of coming storm. Not a breath of air stirred the long rank grass in the lonely arid meadow; where the dull cows grazed all day; not the faintest breeze stirred the honeysuckle, or scarlet runner, that lifted its blood-red stars into the window at which Edith Torwood sat, her thoughtful face resting on her hand, her eyes wandering dreamily over the wide sea. It was in her own pretty room she sat, with its pictures, and its books, and its little cottage piano in a shady corner; its birds, its flowers, and a thousand-and-one daily, useless, charming trifles a woman loves to gather round her.

The window was wide open to catch the breeze that came not, and Edith, watching the sun go down, red and lurid in a sullen and angry sky, was thinking of the life she had left behind in sunny Cuba, of her present life among those at once strangers and relatives, and of the life to come, not beyond the grave, but as the bride of St. Leon. How long the two weeks she had spent at Torwood Towers seemed, and how few friends she had made. One would have thought she and Lucy, gentle, loving Lucy,

would have been bosom friends and confidantes; but things never turn out in this world as one might reasonably expect, but, strange to say, Edith had taken a violent and most causeless prejudice against her elder sister, as she had also against Dr. Stuart, and was like a block of marble to both. One might likewise think that Madge, who personally resembled her most of all, and whose frank, open nature made her universally liked, would have been her pet and favorite, but here again reasonable expectation was at fault. Florence—fair, fickle, selfish shallow, inane Florence—she had taken for her darling, the only inmate of Torwood Towers she more than tolerated. In no one single respect, mentally, morally, or physically were they alike; but extremes meet, and perhaps for that very reason, Edith half idolized her. Her beauty, too, might have had something to do with it. The hot blooded Creole adored beauty, and would sit for hours dipping her fingers in the golden rings of hair, or playing lady's maid to the fair Florence. All this suited the third Miss Torwood very well, and she liked to be with Edith, and share her room and her jewelry, and the contents of her confection box. Florence was a rank gourmand, any one could reach her heart through her palate; but whether she had any real affection for the sister who loved her so, was quite another question. For the rest, Madge she disliked excessively, Madame Torwood she dreaded, Dr. Stuart she shrank from visibly, Lucy, and the cook she liked very well, and that was about the extent of it. There was enough rosy flesh and bounding blood in Florence Torwood, but very little heart.

The crimson sunset was still flaring itself out in the sky, when Edith rose with a long-drawn breath, as if from a trance, and seated herself at the open piano. Something in the dark glory of the evening must have been in her heart, for she struck into Mendelssohn's hymn of praise. "Let all that has life and breath sing to the Lord." Grandly, gloriously, the sublime words and sublimer music floated out through the still halls and passages, dying away at last in a faint, sweet sigh.

As her inspired fingers dropped from the keys, the door opened unceremoniously, and Miss Florence came in with a lovely bouquet of snow-white roses and glowing carnations in her hand, looking pretty as a picture in her white muslin dress, her hair hanging damp and half uncurled over her bare shoulders. She stared in transient amaze at Edith, who welcomed her with a glad smile.

"You here, Edith! I thought you were over in Torwoodtown."

"So I was, *ma belle*, but I am back. What lovely roses! Where did you get them?"

Florence bent over the flowers, and touched their cool petals with her lips. Was it the shade of the carnations, or had the ever-ready blood risen red to her face, when she answered:

"I got them from Mr. St. Leon. He brought them for you, I suppose, and as he could not see you, he gave them to me."

"Giaccomo here!" exclaimed Edith, in a tone of vexation; "and I wanted to see him particularly. Why did he not come in?"

"Lucy said you were over in Torwoodtown. He

only went ten minutes ago. Mr. Torwood was here, too."

"Too bad! Lucy might have looked, I think, before being so positive. I came home half an hour ago. Did he say he brought these flowers for me?"

"No; but of course he did. I wasn't speaking to him five minutes, for just then that horrid Dr. Stuart came along, and I ran away."

Edith laughed.

"How frightened you are of that terrible doctor, my dear! What has he ever done to you?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Why do you blush, then, every time you catch his eye? and what is the meaning of that odd smile of his when he looks at you?"

Florence jerked herself uneasily in her chair and pouted.

"You knew him before you came here? Confess, my darling," Edith said, bending half laughingly over her.

"Well, yes then! if you will have it," cried Florence impatiently, "and I hate the sight of him—I do."

"I don't particularly love him myself," said Edith, her scornful lips curling; "tell me all about it."

"It is not much to tell, but such things make me feel horrid. It was at school. Mademoiselle De Juponville, stingy thing! used to half starve us girls—they always do at boarding-schools, you know. Now what are you laughing at?"

"Never mind," said Edith, who was looking at her sister's plump proportion and round red cheeks; "you don't look much like a half-starved subject, that's all."

"Well, no matter about that," said Florence, testily; "we were half starved—kept on transparent slices of bread and butter, and such tea! Well, whenever we got a chance, you know, we used to make up for it by feasting on the sly. And what do you think? one night we ate so much pastry and rich cake, we were all awfully sick next day. Made-moiselle, who was scared pretty nearly into fits, thought the cholera had broken loose in the school, and sent in hot haste for a doctor. The doctor came and who do you suppose he was?"

"Dr. Paul Stuart," laughed Edith.

"Yes, indeed, and he kept questioning and questioning—hateful, prying thing!—until Jane Gore, who never could keep a secret, blurted the whole thing out. I declare I was fit to die of shame! and the nasty thing made us each swallow an emetic, or something that nearly killed us! I hate the sight of him ever since!"

Edith laughed till the tears stood in her eyes.

"I don't wonder! Did you never see him again until you met him here?"

"No, never. They say I blushed like anything I am sure it was no wonder."

"Not the least; and that's the wonderful secret! What a dull story," and she laughed again.

"Oh, yes, its very funny, I dare say," said Florence, testily; "but if you were in my place, I guess you wouldn't see anything to laugh at. Every time he looks at me, especially at table, with that disagreeable smile of his, he always seems saying, 'Don't eat too much, or I'll give you another emetic. I wish he was in Jericho—I do!'"

"So do I! Of all the mean creatures—but there, I won't detract. Come, let us go out; I have no patience to stay in this house when I think of him, and know it may be his some day. Florence, don't you ever marry him," almost fiercely, and with a terrible light in the gray eyes, "or I will never forgive you!"

"Law!" lisped Florence, who had caught the word from Madge, "what an idea! I am sure I always feel like running a mile at sight of him. Besides, he's not a bit good-looking, and I wouldn't marry any but a handsome man for the world."

"My pretty sister," Edith smiled, passing her arm round the other's waist, "you are lovely enough to marry a prince. What a close evening it is. Let us go out to the garden."

The air was almost as oppressively close in the grounds as in the house—not a breeze stirred the leaves of the trees, rustled the tall, parched grass, or moved the drooping and wilted flowers. The sun had sunk, a scarlet and inflamed ball, in a lurid sky alternately barred with black and red, and the ominous warning of coming tempest sounded in the smothered booming of the sea. The girls walked down the long, dark avenue leading to the shore, a darker shadow than that cast by the gloomy trees on the face of one—Edith. People of sensitive, nervous temperaments feel storm and danger before it comes, and vague presentiments were thrilling through the Creole girl's heart. Even Florence, albeit not of the sensitive kind, drew within herself with a sort of shiver.

"Some one is walking over my grave!" she said.

"What a dismal place! Do let us go back."

"Not yet; I like this dark, lonely walk—I like this eerie and ghostly evening. It suits me."

"You are easily suited then; it gives me the horrors! A murder might be committed among these black trees, and no one be the wiser! I do believe it is haunted."

"Are you superstitious, too, Florence? Do you believe in ghosts?"

Florence gave a little scream, and clutched Edith's arm.

"How can you talk of such things here! You frighten me to death! Do let us go away."

Edith turned reluctantly. As she said, the place suited her—she took a morbid pleasure in its dismal gloom. The perpetual moan of the ceaseless sea, the unbroken loneliness and silence of the arid meadows, the black cedar woods, and the mysterious murmurings of the tall trees around, had a weird and mystic charm for her. They suited this overcast and ominous evening, too, heavy with forebodings, and with regret she turned to go.

"Ever since I came here, my pretty sister," she said, lovingly, holding Florence round the waist, "this place has had a charm for me. I love to lie under the trees listening to the waves and the fishermen's songs, and yet—"

"Yet what? You're the greatest oddity, Edith," Florence said, plaintively, sniffing at her flowers.

"Am I? I dare say I am, but my oddity was born with me. Do you know," she said, speaking out as if from a sudden impulse, "I sometimes think

I will never go back to Cuba again. Oh, my dear, beautiful Cuba! where I was so very, very happy, and where no odious stepmothers and detestable sons ever came.

Florence started in her weak way.

"Law! and what makes you think you will never go back?"

"Because," and Edith's dark face was full of somber prophecy, and her solemn gray eyes full of strange light, "because, Florence, dear, I think I am to die here!"

Florence gave another horrified little shriek, "Good gracious, Edith! what horrid things you do say! You haven't consumption, or heart disease, la grippe, or anything of that sort, have you?"

Edith laughed in spite of her gloom.

"Thank heaven, no! I never was sick a week in my whole life. No, it is not that; it is a presentiment, a foreboding, a warning of something to come. Perhaps I am weak, morbid, superstitious, but it is there, and will not be banished."

"Dear me!" lisped Florence, shrugging her shoulders, "how odd, and how disagreeable of you to talk of such things to me in this gloomy place. You have made me decidedly nervous."

Something flashed through Edith's mind about casting pearls before swine, but she banished it, and, stooping with a forced laugh, kissed the pretty, pouting face.

"I am selfish to talk of such ghastly things to you, my darling; but it came out without my meaning it. How do you like being here?—does Torwood Towers suit you?" asked Edith.

"Suit me!" resentfully exclaimed Florence. "I tell you I hate it. Of all the dull, tiresome, stupid, hateful holes—"

A gesture finished the sentence, for which she could find no words sufficiently strong.

"Dull it certainly is," said Edith, looking round; "but still I like it. It is not the place for you, though."

"It is not the place for any one in her senses. It is nothing but an old tomb, smelling like a vault of must and rats. Even the boarding-school was ever so much better than this."

"What will you do when I go back to Cuba?"

"I don't know," drearily. "I shall die."

"No, you will not; belle Florence, pretty sister, you shall come with me when I go back to Cuba a bride."

"You will never go back to Cuba a bride," a hollow voice said.

They had reached the end of the avenue, and were near the shrubbery, a place dark and dense as the heart of a primeval forest, and from its wooded depths the hollow voice had come.

With a wild shriek of affright, Florence turned and sped off like a bolt from a bow; but Edith, with every trace of color fading from cheeks and lips, stood like a stone.

"You never will go back to Cuba a bride, Edith Torwood," the hollow voice repeated, and then there was a plunging and crashing within the shrubbery, and something tall and black went rapidly by and disappeared in the evening gloom.

Edith stood like a statue, as white and nearly as cold as death,

A voice at her elbow aroused her.

"Miss Edith, what is the matter? Are you ill?"

She turned slowly, and at the sight of Dr. Stuart's anxious face, momentarily suspended consciousness came slowly back.

"No," she said, turning to go; but he followed her.

"I met Florence just now, running for her life, and screaming appallingly, and I find you standing like a galvanized corpse. Will you not tell me what has frightened you?"

"No," she reiterated, coldly; and passing him with a bow his mother could not have surpassed in freezing hauteur, she went up the piazza steps to the house.

In the doorway she was confronted by the pale and startled face of Lucy.

"Edith, what is this Florence tells me? You are as pale as a ghost."

"It is nothing. Some one has been playing a practical joke; that is all. Where is Madge?"

"Out sailing; it is no joke of hers."

"Some of the negroes then. You need not wear that frightened face. I tell you it is nothing."

"But you look so dreadful."

"Do I? I am foolish and nervous, and it startled me at first. I am going to my room now, and will not be down again this evening."

"But Mr. St. Leon and Mr. Torwood left word they were going to call."

"Make my excuses then. I am not fit to appear. This ridiculous affair has unstrung my nerves. Where is Florence?"

"Up in your room, nearly out of her wits with fright. Can I do anything for you?"

"Thank you. Tell Mr. St. Leon to come again to-morrow. Good-night."

"Good-night," Lucy said, looking anxiously after her, as she toiled wearily up-stairs. "I wonder what it could have been."

"So do I," said Dr. Stuart, making his appearance; "have they not told you, either?"

"Florence says they saw a ghost in the shrubbery, and Edith says some one has been playing a practical joke, and both seem half scared to death."

"I think Miss Edith's version is apt to be nearer the truth. How dark that sky is; we will have a storm to-morrow."

"There come Mr. St. Leon and Mr. Torwood. If they stay late they will be caught in the storm going home," said Lucy, entering the house to have all the doors and shutters and windows made fast, in expectation of the coming tempest.

Florence, notwithstanding her terrors, and palpitations, and hysterics, managed to make her appearance in the drawing-room in a most bewitching toilet, but Edith was miserable all evening. The visitors were disappointed, of course, but they managed to stay until nearly eleven, nevertheless.

The coming storm was still mute in the troubled sky, and Dr. Stuart, lighting a cigar, walked up and down the piazza for nearly an hour.

It was a dark, sultry night, not made for sleep, with a watery, sickly moon glimmering palely through banks of clouds, and a phosphorescent light in the stagnant air. The sounds of silence, the chirp

of a bird in its nest, the slipping of a snake in the woods, the cracking of a dry branch, the ticking of a clock in the hall, all were strangely loud in the midnight gloom.

Twelve pealed sharply from the clock in the hall. Dr. Stuart flung away his smoked out cigar, and was turning to go in when an unexpected sight caught his eye and arrested his step.

A chamber window opening on the piazza softly swung out, a figure, slender and girlish in spite of the shrouding mantle that draped it, stepped out, and looked cautiously around.

The young doctor drew back, and leaned against a pillar; its shade hid him completely. The dark figure glided by, its garments almost touching him, went down the piazza stairs, and made straight for the shrubbery.

Another dark form rose up at its approach, and for half an hour and upward the two stood together, two black shadows among the other black shadows around. And then they parted—one vanishing among the trees, the other returning to the house. Once again her dress brushed the doctor in passing, and he watched her glide in through the open window, heard it softly close, and then he stepped out, and took off his hat to let the gale, rising now, fan his hot brow. The watery moon, breaking from behind a black cloud, shone for a moment on a face white as ashes.

“Can it be,” was his thought, “that all my worst suspicions turn true? Is one of these sister spouses of a demon?”

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE OF EDITH'S ANGELS.

"Fetch along the line, Jinks, and fill my cigar-case. You are sure Faust had his dinner, eh?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"That's right; and, Jinks, if any one calls for me tell him I have gone to Silver Stream for trout. Come, Faust."

With his wide-awake hat on one side of his head, a fishing-rod over his shoulder, and Faust jogging along by his side, Mr. St. Leon went off whistling. Jinks, the hostler of the Torwoodtown Hotel, looked after him, and so did some half dozen loafers lounging before the entrance.

"Who's that swell?" one of them asked.

"A foreigner, I guess," replied Mr. Jinks; "leastways he's got an all-fired foreign name. Uncommon nice young gent as ever was he is too, and free of his spondulicks as a prince."

"I wish he had stood treat," said another loafer; "he did yesterday for all hands. They say, Jinks, he's sweet upon one of them young ladies at Torwood Towers."

"Don't know," said Mr. Jinks; "he never said nothing to me about it: but he goes there I reckon, 'long with that other black-visaged chap that stops

here. He's good enough for a queen, I think myself."

Unconscious of Mr. Jinks' eulogy, Mr. St. Leon was walking serenely along toward Silver Stream, whistling still, stopping now and then to pat the children he met on the head, and throw them coppers. Short as his stay had been in the town, he had managed in that magical way of his to win golden opinions from all sorts of people. From the rosy girls, who fell in love with his handsome face; from the young men, with whom he was hail fellow well met; from the children, whom he patted and to whom he threw the coppers; from their mammas, as a matter of course; and from the loafers, for whom he was always willing to stand drinks all round.

The world and Mr. St. Leon went remarkably well with each other, and whistling all the time, he reached Silver Stream in half an hour, and threw himself lazily on the bank, lighted a cigar, and began staring reflectively at vacancy. Evidently he was not a very enthusiastic disciple of Isaac Walton, for his cigar was smoked out, the stump thrown away, and his fishing-rod lay unused still. Faust looked up at him with sleepy eyes, and the young man patted him on the head.

"It's a bad business, old boy," he said, "and hanging, drawing, and quartering would be a great deal too good for me; but I'll do it, nevertheless. It's fate, I suppose—we'll say so, at least."

He drew from his pocket a note-book and tiny inkstand. From between the leaves of the former he drew a dainty sheet of note paper—tinted, per-

fumed, gilt-edged—and, using the note-book for a desk, began to write. The letter was in French, and began "Angel of my Dreams," and in ten minutes three sides were full, and it was ended. Deliberately he re-read, folded, put it in an envelope, and was just about to write the address, when a sudden voice at his elbow caused him to look up.

"So absorbed had he been, that a man's footstep coming through the grass had not reached him, and Dr. Stuart was standing by his side, eyeing him with composure.

"Don't let me intrude," he said; finish your manuscript by all means."

"As if I would let a third party glance at my love-letters!" said Leon, coolly, putting the document and note-book in his pocket. Where did you drop from, pray?"

"I went to your hotel and they told me you were here," replied Dr. Stuart, stretching himself on the bank. "How are you, Faust, old fellow? Do you know you are expected at the Towers this afternoon?"

"I have a hazy remembrance of promising to make my appearance there to-day, and thought to do so to better advantage by fetching a string of silvery and savory trout; but somehow I don't progress very fast."

"I should think not, indeed! Hand me the line."

Mr. St. Leon lazily did so, and took a more comfortable position on the grass.

"And how are they all over there?" he asked, "your lady mother and her four pretty step-daughters,"

"Tolerable—that is, excepting Miss Edith, who has to grief somehow lately, it seems to me."

"Has she? It's ages since I saw her. What's gone wrong?"

"A ghost has been cutting capers in the shrubbery, it appears," said Dr. Stuart, gravely, "and has frightened her and Florence out of a year's growth."

"Indeed! a live ghost, I suppose—probably that very fast young person, Madge."

"I think not; but I know nothing about it, only that both got a rare fright. Have you your cigar-case about you?"

Mr. St. Leon handed it to him, and then helped himself.

"It is not easy frightening Edith either," he remarked, watching the blue smoke curl upward; "she was born like Mrs. Partington, before nerves came in fashion. Has the ghost caused all the headaches that have rendered her invisible?"

"I fancy so! You are dejected, I suspect, not having seen her for eight-and-forty hours. Look at that fellow, how he picks!"

"He'll break the hook if you're not careful. No, by Jove, you have him! What an angler you are, Stuart! Dejected—of course I am, and also is another friend of yours,"

"Mr. Angus Torwood, our interesting and excessively brigandish cousin?"

"The same. The fellow's perfectly infatuated in that quarter."

"More fool he to get the steam up so high about another man's property. Still, St. Leon, if you'll

excuse my saying it, he would suit Miss Edith Torwood far better than you."

"Miss Edith Torwood does not think so," said St. Leon, smoking complacently on, "and her opinion's of some weight in the matter, I take it."

"How long have you been engaged to her? But pardon me; I am growing impertinent."

"My dear fellow," said Mr. St. Leon, stifling a yawn, "make no apologies, I beg. Ask as many questions as you please, and I'll answer. Miss Edith Torwood has been *fiancée* to your humble servant, let me see, upward of three months."

"Is that all?" Dr. Stuart said, watching thoughtfully a nibbling trout; "and of all four she is the one least suited to you. Florence, now; I should think, would do ever so much better."

"All a matter of choice, my dear fellow," drawled St. Leon; "perhaps you prefer blonde beauties, and perhaps I don't. Every man to his taste. There, you have another—what a whopper!"

"Capital stream, this! Madge and I have spent whole days here. By the way, what do you think of Madge?"

"That she is a very nice young lady, with whom I intend to have nothing whatever to do."

"You are hard to please. I think you had better resign Edith, and take Madge—she would make a better Mrs. St. Leon."

"I'll take four-and-twenty hours to consider the matter. What confounded cigars! I'll bring an action against those swindlers at the hotel for poisoning society with such execrable weeds—I swear I will!"

"I have smoked better in my time. Where is Cousin Angus to-day?"

"As if I knew! Over at your place, very likely."

"Making eyes at Edith! Are you not a little jealous?"

"Not the least. I'm a philosopher, I flatter myself, and a fatalist, and all that sort of thing, and then you know the old rhyme:

"So long as she's content,
So long I'll prove true,
And then if she changes,
Why, so can I, too."

"I wish she heard you!"

"She might! I would say it all the same!"

"You would be a discarded suitor in five minutes, then! The girl is proud as Lucifer."

Mr. St. Leon made a slight grimace.

"Don't I know that! But, then, to counterbalance the fact, she really is very fond of yours truly."

"I know it," Dr. Stuart quietly said; "more's the pity!"

Mr. St. Leon looked at him in calm inquiry.

"My good friend, when I resign Edith, am I to resign her to the future lord of Torwood Towers?"

"If you mean me by that title, no."

"Oh," said his companion, lighting another of the execrable cigars, "you seem to take such an interest in the matter, I did not know whether you were not getting into the same lamentable state of mind with Mr. Torwood. Wise men have turned fools before to-day,"

Dr. Stuart laughed.

"There is a commandment which says 'Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods,' and I always keep the commandments. Besides, it strikes me I should like a handsome wife. I think I'll marry Florence."

"She would not have you!"

"No? Not even with fifty thousand dollars and Torwood Towers thrown in?"

"The bribe is heavy—but no—you will never marry Florence!"

"Unhappy wretch that I am! I had been flattering myself that lovely face would comfort me three hundred and sixty-five times a year across the breakfast table, and here are all my high hopes dashed to the earth at one fell blow. Is it that I'm not good-looking enough?"

That for one thing, and besides——"

"Besides what?"

"I thought Lucy, the fair, the gentle, the sweet, was to be the happy one."

"Very true—I forgot Lucy! How would you like her yourself?"

"I never had much fancy for cream candy; it doesn't agree with me; but that's no reason why it should disagree with others."

"Quite right! And Lucy is very pretty—next to Florence, the best looking of the lot."

"What a lucky fellow you are, Stuart, to come in for all that tin, and a pretty wife besides. That mother of yours is a clever woman."

Sly St. Leon! Looking under his eyelashes, he saw the doctor wince, and enjoyed it amazingly.

"There's another! What superb fish they are! Shall we go? It is dodging on for five o'clock."

"With all my heart! Are we to walk?"

"No, my drag is over at the hotel; it will take us in half an hour."

The two sauntered back. St. Leon changed his dress, took his place in the drag, and was soon flying over the ground at a 2.40 rate, that speedily brought them to their destination.

As they sprang from the light wagon the eyes of both caught sight of a white muslin skirt glancing in and out among the trees near at hand. Dr. Stuart looked at his companion with one of his queer smiles.

"The woman in White," he said, "and not Wilkie Collins' heroine either. It is something new for Miss Florence to take a constitutional before dinner, exercise not being much in her line. I wonder if she saw us. Oh, here she comes; go and pay your respects, while I convey the trout to Miss Lucy."

Fair as a poet's vision, in translucent white, with pale blue ribbons floating about her, flowers in her shining hair, and a blue and gold book of poems in her hand, Florence came out from the trees, and Mr. St. Leon, nothing loth, went up and joined her. Dr. Stuart gave one backward glance, and sauntered on to the drawing-room, that doubtful smile of his bright on his face. In the hall he met Edith coming down stairs.

"Mr. St. Leon is in the grounds," said; "I think he is waiting for you."

He bowed low and swept past in silence. He glanced after the tall, straight, stately figure, smiling still.

"Dr. Johnson liked a good hater," he thought; "what a pity he did not know you!"

Edith went down the piazza stairs, and out into the grounds. Two figures stood under a spreading chestnut, one in floating white, the other, St. Leon, she knew; but what could St. Leon have to say so very earnestly to Florence. Neither saw or heard her, as she stepped lightly over the yielding sward, and was it fancy or did she really see him hand her something like a letter. In another instant she was near enough to catch his last words.

"If you wear it at dinner I shall take it for a token of assent, and——"

He stopped short, for Florence had sprung away with a suppressed startled cry, her whole face turning scarlet. Edith was besides him, looking at them both out of her powerful gray eyes. Anything more guilty than Florence looked could hardly exist; but Mr. St. Leon, whom an earthquake could not ruffle, turned to greet her with constitutional coolness.

"Are you shod with the slippers of silence, mademoiselle? You have startled this nervous young lady half out of her wits."

Edith laughed good naturedly—no shadow of suspicion in her mind.

"Don't blush so furiously, my pretty sister; it is not high treason to be caught talking to Giacomo. Come down with us to the shore for a walk."

She would have passed her arm girl-fashion round her waist, but Florence, her face still burning, her eyes averted, shrunk away. One hand was hidden in the fold of her dress, and that something white

Edith had seen St. Leon give her was tightly crushed therein.

"What *is* the matter with you?" Edith cried wonderingly; "won't you come?"

"No," said Florence, turning away, "I want to go to the house. I don't care for walking, I——"

She did not finish the sentence but walked away, and Edith looked after her in the last degree astonished. St. Leon broke into a low laugh.

"Well," said Edith, turning to him, "and what does it all mean?"

"That your sister is a goose, my dear. I was paying her compliments, as in duty bound, when you came up and caught us, and behold the result; I thought young ladies trained in fashionable boarding-schools understood these things better!"

"For shame, sir! Florence is a child, and you deserve to have your ears boxed. Come for a walk before dinner."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT THE MOON SAW.

THEY went down to the shore, and walked slowly up and down the sands, while Florence, up in her room, was reading a letter. The letter began "Angel of my dreams," and there was a ring in closed, and as she read she covered her hot face with both hands, and laid it down on the table. It was the dinner bell that aroused her at last, and she went down, in a violent tremor still. All were assembled but Madge, and that young person flashed in, breezy and breathless as usual, just as they were taking their seats. Miss Madge was in a high state of excitement, and broke out in shrill tones at once.

"Only guess who I met just now, Lucy, as I was coming from Torwoodtown."

"My dear Madge, don't talk so loudly. How can I guess; you met a good many people, no doubt."

"Pshaw! You might try. I met old Huldah, the fortune-teller."

"What!" said Lucy, looking interested, "not Huldah that used to live in the cedar woods?"

"That's her!" said Madge, who was no way particular about her grammar. "She was strutting along, as if she had a pair of seven-league boots on, and invited me to stop and have my fortune told."

"And did you?" asked Dr. Stuart.

"Catch me! I told her I was in a hurry for my dinner, being sure of a blowing up if I were late, and invited her to call up here some evening, and predict for us all in a lot. You see, Dr. Stuart, I'm worried to know which of us you are going to marry, and—Edith, what's the matter?"

She might well ask. Edith had turned white, even to her lips.

"Nothing," she answered, seeing them all stare, "I do not feel quite well, but it is nothing. A glass of water please."

"I thought Huldah had left here long ago," said Lucy, filling Edith's glass. "My dear Edith, you look dreadfully pale; we will get Dr. Stuart to prescribe for you."

"Oh, she's come back again," cut in Madge, before the doctor could speak. "Won't it be jolly, though, if she takes me at my word, and comes up here to tell fortunes!"

"Who is this Huldah?" asked St. Leon. "I hope she may come—I want to get my fortune told of all things."

"A poor half-witted mulatto," replied Lucy. "A slave once, but free now, who goes wandering over the country, and when here lives in a wretched hut in the cedar woods, and supports herself by telling fortunes. Edith, do you feel better? You eat nothing."

"I am much better, thank you."

Madame Torwood was just opening her lips to utter a tirade against fortune-telling when there was another shrill cry from Madge:

"Oh, Florence! what a nice ring! Where did it come from? I never saw you wear it before."

Poor Florence! It never would have done for her to be placed in a criminal dock—her face would have borne grievous witness against her. Once again it was hanging out the red ensign of guilt. Dr. Stuart looked amused, Lucy and Edith half smiled at her embarrassment, and Mr. St. Leon leaned forward to look. It was a beautiful ring, cluster diamonds richly set, and blazed with rainbow fire on the plump, pretty hand.

"Very nice, indeed," was his criticism. "Is it your engagement ring, Miss Florence?"

"As if she would tell you," said Madge. "Florence, I wish you would give me a few lessons in blushing! You're complete mistress of the art."

This remark did not at all tend to diminish the scarlet tide ebbing and flowing in the young lady's face, and her confusion grew so painful that Lucy, ever good-natured, came to the rescue.

"Is Mr. Torwood coming over this evening, Mr. St. Leon?" she asked.

"Can't say. Mr. Torwood does not honor me with his confidence."

"Of course he will," said Madge; "he couldn't stay away if he tried, and he doesn't try, for here he is now, just in time to be late."

But Mr. Torwood had dined, and had merely come to spend the evening. A very pleasant evening it was with music and cards, and conversation and chess, and the midnight moon was high in the sky when the two young men from Torwoodtown rode leisurely over the hill-side to their hotel.

Florence, pleading a headache, had gone up-stairs some two hours previously, but when Edith entered her room she found it deserted. Lucy crossing the hall, lamp in hand, explained :

"Florence is going to stay in her own room to-night. She told me to say her head ached so she could not sleep, and knew she would keep you from sleeping also. Good-night !"

"Good-night !" Edith said ; but instead of retiring, she went to Florence's door and rapped. Florence opened it, still in her dinner dress, her cheeks yet hot, her eyes still humid. She shrank away, as she had done in the grounds, at sight of Edith.

"Don't ask me to stay with you to-night," she said, hastily ; "I always want to be alone when my head aches."

"Poor child," Edith said, tenderly, "you are in a high fever. Can I do anything for you ?"

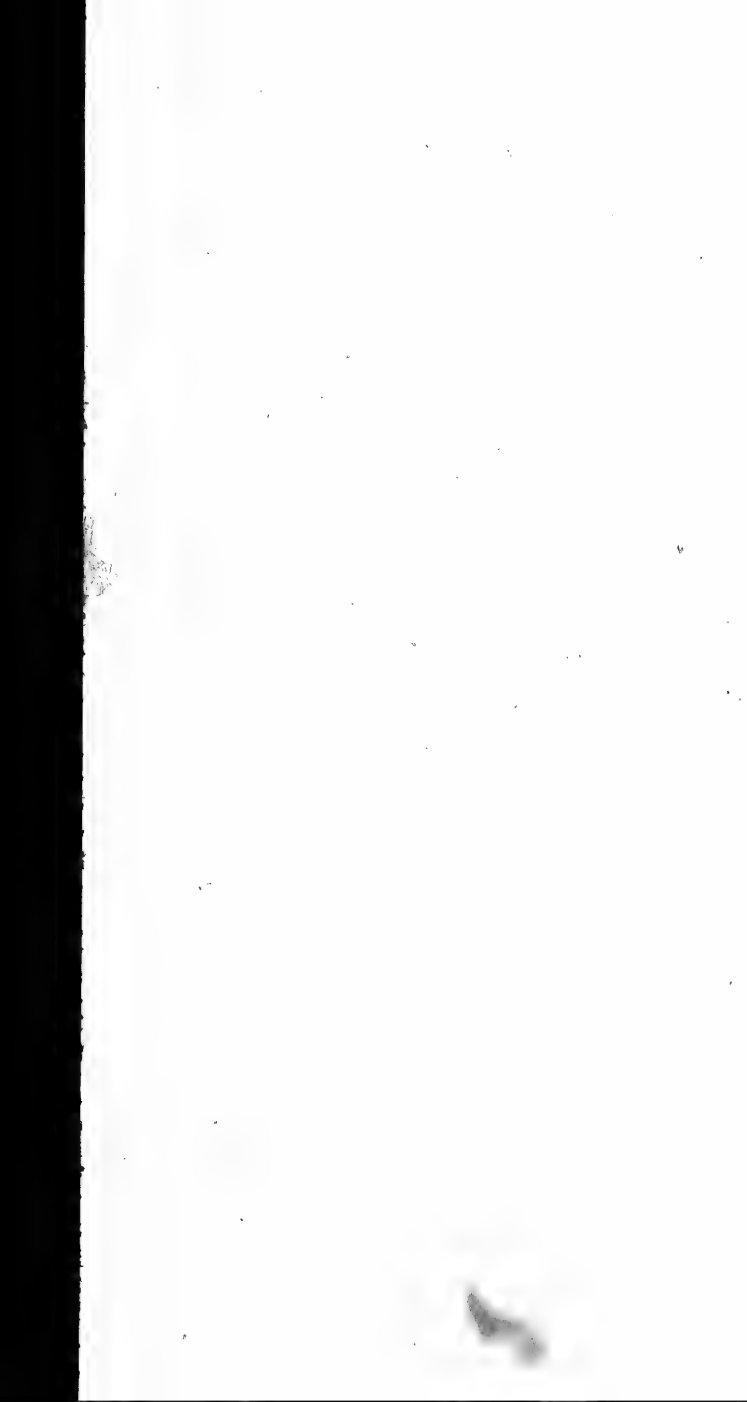
"Nothing ; Lucy did all she could. I will be better to-morrow."

"Don't sit up then ; good-night."

She turned away, and heard Florence close and lock her door. She did not go to sleep though ; the moon, looking in through the curtains, saw what she was doing ; but the moon, though a female, can keep secrets, and no one was likely to be the wiser.

What a solemn midnight moon ! It shone on Giacomo St. Leon sleeping the sleep of the just, his head on his arm, his handsome face smiling in his dreams ; it shone on Lucy and Madge slumbering side by side, in the peaceful repose of youth and health ; it shone on Dr. Stuart, on the shadowy piazza, watching a dark figure prowling about the

grounds, a figure not seen for the first time ; it shone on Edith walking up and down her room meditatively ; and it shone on Florence, "innocent as a child," sitting reading and re-reading the letter beginning "Angel of my dreams."



CHAPTER XV.

RESPECTFULLY DECLINED.

It was a miserable morning in Torwoodtown. It had rained all night ; it was raining still, a miserable, sulky drizzle-drizzle, that penetrated through everything, and was as much worse than an honest, hearty downpour, as moping and silence is worse than a hot and hearty outburst of temper. The sky was of lead, without one bright break in its uniform dullness to give promise of fairer weather. The sea was of leaden gray, too, and boomed on the shore in long, hoarse roars. The trees were dripping and sodden ; pools of water filled the straggling street ; the houses had that black, and dismal, and comfortless appearance houses always wear on rainy days ; the sea wind was chill and raw, and the few pedestrians hurrying under limp umbrellas, to and fro, looked blue and cross, and miserable. A wretched morning, that made you yawn drearily, and gave you the blues in the dimmest way—a morning on which you felt damp and shivery, and everything you touched seemed clammy and broken out into a sticky perspiration—a morning trying to the temper—on which, if you were the least inclined to be crabbed and cross—it was sure to come out, and you made yourself and everybody around you exquisitely unhappy.

There could have been nothing crabbed or cross in the angelic temperament of Mr. Giacomo St. Leon, for on this dreary and dismal morning he sat in the smoking-room of the Torwoodtown Hotel, his boots elevated on the window-sill, his chair tipped back, putting the apartment to its legitimate use, and smoking one after another of the execrable cigars, until he was quite lost to view in clouds of blue smoke. He had asked for something to read, but the library of the establishment boasted of but four volumes—a Bible of tryingly small type, "Robinson Crusoe," with the beginning and end torn out, an old English grammar, and a dictionary. None of these works proving of very exciting interest, Mr. St. Leon had no resource but smoking and thinking, and he had been doing the former for the last hour with an energy worthy of a better cause. As he was lighting his ninth cigar the door opened, and the landlord, looking like an overgrown leach in a long shiny mackintosh and glazed cap, stuck his head through the aperture.

"I'm going to the post-office, sir; shall I ask for you?"

"I don't expect anything," said Mr. St. Leon; "but you may ask all the same. Where's Mr. Torwood?"

"Writing in his own room. He gave me this big letter to post."

Mr. St. Leon glanced at the letter—a most official-looking document, with an immense seal. He stared as he read the address.

"To the Honorable—" he checked himself suddenly. "Now, what the deuce has Torwood to do with the War Department at Washington?"

The landlord went off, and the young gentleman sat smoking and staring at the steamed and blurred window, and revolving the last question over in his mind. Before he could obtain any satisfactory answer to it, ~~mine~~ host was back with two letters, one bearing a foreign postmark, bordered and sealed with black; the other a tiny affair, superscribed in a dainty schoolgirl hand.

"Blessed are they who shall expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed," said St. Leon; "are either of these for me?"

"This little one is—a love-letter, I expect, by the look of it," said Boniface, handing it over; "this 'ere other one is for Mr. Torwood, and comes from foreign parts. Some of his folks, I expect, is dead."

"Postmarked Cuba," said St. Leon, looking at it. "I wonder—— But it's no affair of mine. Who is this small epistle from, I should like to know?"

"It doesn't come as far as Mr. Torwood's," said the landlord, knowingly; "it's postmarked in the town."

"You had better send Mr. Torwood his letter, my friend," remarked Mr. St. Leon quietly, and as the man went off he looked at the delicate writing again. "'Giaccomo St. Leon, Esquire, Torwood-town Hotel,'—that's all right; but who is the writer? Not Edith; her fine, decided chirography is nothing like this fairy-like tracery. Can it be—by Jove! I've hit it!"

It was a very uncommon sight to behold the usually phlegmatic Giaccomo St. Leon excited, but for once in his life he came very near it now. His handsome face flushed, and he tore off the envelope,

and devoured the contents in two seconds. It was brief, only two little pages, but he read and re-read these at least a dozen times, his face fairly radiant with delight. As he was going through it for the thirteenth time, the door abruptly opened, and Angus Torwood stood before him, his dark face a shade paler and graver than usual. His keen eye fell on the rose colored billet, and on the ecstatic face of the reader, with a glance that seemed to pierce his thoughts. St. Leon hastily crumpled it in his hand, and, his customary coolness came back.

"No bad news, I trust, Mr. Torwood? Old Hurst brought you a letter in mourning."

"Bad enough," said Mr. Torwood, with cold abruptness; "Madame Rosiere is dead."

St. Leon rose hastily, with a face full of concern.

"Madame Rosiere, Edith's aunt, dead! Is it possible? When did she die?"

"Three weeks ago, of yellow fever. Hurst—I say, Hurst—where are you?"

"Here, sir," said Mr. Hurst, making his appearance.

"Have my horse saddled and brought round at once."

Mr. Hurst hurried off to obey, and St. Leon rose to leave the room.

"Are you for the Towers?" he asked.

"I am."

"Be good enough to tell Edith—to tell her that I will be over in the course of the day. I am very sorry to hear of Madame Rosiere's death."

Mr. Torwood made no reply—he cared very little for talking to his cousin's betrothed at any time,

and on this particular morning he was unusually silent and stern. Hurst made his appearance with the horse, and he was leaving the room when his eye fell on something St. Leon had dropped. He picked it up, a look of fierce joy flashed over his swarthy face, and thrusting it in his pocket, he strode out, mounted, and dashed through the town at a furious rate. Mr. Hurst, with his hands deep in his trousers pockets, looked after him with an admiring eye.

"What a cove that is on horseback! He'll be at the Towers in fifteen minutes if he keeps that 'ere up."

Mr. Torwood did keep it up, and reached the old house in a very short time. Going up-stairs he found Edith in the hall, looking out of the oriel window at the drear July day, with something of its gloom in her face. She had been alone and lonely all day. Florence seemed to avoid her perversely ever since that evening in the shrubbery, two days ago now; she had visibly shrank from her, and Edith was far too proud to force herself on any one. For the society of Lucy or Madge she did not care, and she avoided the drawing-room steadfastly, for either Madame Torwood or her son were constantly there. Both were there now, and Lucy was at the piano, touching the keys so softly that the murmur of the surf could distinctly be heard above the low tones in which she was singing "What are the Wild Waves Saying?" Edith was listening to the sweet low voice, and watching the drizzling rain blistering the windows, but she turned from both with a look of intense relief at the well-known

step, and held out her hand to her cousin, with a breath of relief.

"Oh, Angus! how glad I am to see you! I am half dead of loneliness this dismal day!"

He just touched the frankly extended hand, and stood beside her in dark silence, looking out at the sodden grass and trees and gloomy sky, and seeing neither.

She looked at him with wistful eyes. "What is it, Angus? Has anything gone wrong?"

"Yes."

Still that wistful gaze; but still looking at the pale blank of wet and mist, he seemed no way inclined to speak, and she would not ask further. She turned her eyes from his darkly gloomy face to the window with a low sigh.

"How dreary it all is here. Oh, my beautiful Cuba! that any one should leave you for this cold, bleak land?"

She drew a scarlet shawl she wore closer around her with a shiver. Lucy's song died out like a sigh, and Angus Torwood looked at his companion for the first time.

"You would like to go back to Cuba, then?"

"Like it!" she repeated. "Oh!—" and there she stopped, but her face finished the sentence.

"Are you not happy?"

"How can I be—in the same house with that woman and her son?"

"But your sisters," with a grim smile; "you should be happy with them."

She shrugged her shoulders in her foreign ways. "Bah! we are strangers to each other, and must

always be so. Even Florence, whom I could love—but never mind. Oh, for my Cuban home, where I was always loved and happy!”

“When did you hear from Cuba?”

“Not yet; I expect a letter every day.”

“From your aunt?”

“Yes; dear, dear aunt! I wonder if she misses me much?”

“No, Edith.”

He spoke so solemnly that she looked up in surprise.

“What did you say, Angus?”

“Your aunt does not miss you—she never will miss any one again in this world!”

She grew white, and looked at him with startled eyes, but still she did not comprehend.

“Angus, what are you saying? What do you mean?”

He drew, a letter from his pocket, edged and sealed with black.

“The letter you expected has come, Edith! Here it is!”

She looked at it fearfully, but made no effort to take it. Her startled eyes were still fixed on his ominous face, her own turning whiter and whiter still.

“Angus, I don’t understand. I am afraid to understand! Tell me that all are well at Eden Lawn.”

“I cannot. Take your letter.”

“Angus!”

He laid the letter on the window-sill, folded his arms, and stood ~~firmly~~ looking out. The whole truth came to her at once like a flash!

"Angus!" she cried out, "some one is dead!"

"Yes!"

She snatched up the letter; there was no more hesitation now, and the next moment she knew what she had lost. Knowing how she had loved her dear aunt. Angus Torwood stood bracing himself for a scene. He might have known his cousin Edith, better. Neither word, nor cry, nor tear followed—she stood as if turned to stone. White as a spirit, she leaned against the window, with a look in her eyes that frightened him.

"I should have prepared you for this," he exclaimed; "the shock has been too much for you! Edith, you are going to faint."

He really thought she was, she had become so deadly pale, but she answered quietly:

"No."

"You see you have no home in Cuba now."

"I understand."

He looked at her. Something had gone out of her face, not color, for she was always pale, but all its brightness had faded, and a sort of gray shadow had fallen in its place. There were no tears in the large dark eyes, but something far sadder than any relieving tears could have been. Edith Torwood was one of those unfortunate women who cannot weep, who sit like a stone until the pain at their heart wears itself out.

"Edith," he said, "you will die here! Come with me, and let me make you a home where you will be happy!"

She looked at him, not understanding.

"You, Angus!"

"As my wife, Edith!"

It was out then! Had a bullet struck her, she could not have started more violently, or sprang away more quickly. One glance at his face and she read what had been plain to others so long.

"Oh, Angus!" she cried, in a voice full of reproach.

"Well," he said, bitterly, "is it a crime? Am I to consider that look of horror as my dismissal?"

"Angus, I did not expect this from you—you whom I have loved as a brother!"

"You are very kind! But I want no brotherly love! Out with the answer—yes or no?"

"No, then!" she said, coldly, turning away.

His face turned dark red, and then nearly livid.

"And is it for that little popinjay—that perfumed dandy," he said, setting his teeth hard, "that I am refused! For that miserable, brainless fop, whom I could lay low in the kennel any day if I pleased!"

"Angus," she said, facing him, with the look of a tigress in her eyes, "are you going mad?"

"For that false and cowardly villain," he went on, not heeding her, "who cares so little for her that he leaves her for the pink and white face of that fat simpleton in there, she refuses me."

"Angus Torwood, what are you daring to say?"

"The truth, my fair cousin!" he answered, with bitter scorn. "I have the pleasure of announcing that this pretty little Apollo of yours has cast you off, jilted you—how do you like the word?—for that great inanity in white muslin and yellow curls!"

She looked at him in silence, growing terribly white, and the tigerish look still glaring in her

eyes. But her voice when she spoke was steady and calm.

"It is false!" she said, still watching him. "I did not think a Torwood could stoop to lie!"

"Were you a man you never would repeat that word; as it is—" He drew out a crumpled pink note from his pocket, and spreading it out, pointed to the last page. "Read that!"

She looked. "My own dear Florence," were the words she saw, and then her eyes were once again riveted to his face.

"Well?" was all she said.

"I bring my proofs, you see, Miss Torwood. Mr. St. Leon dropped this pretty little missive, ending, 'Wholly thine, Florence,' this morning, and I brought it here to convince you of his perfidy and the treachery of the sister you love. Take it and read it to the end, and see if any doubt remains."

"No," she said, drawing back with cold contempt, more galling by far than anything else could have been; "I leave acts like that for Angus Torwood. I am not in the habit of purloining other people's letters and reading them by stealth."

His swarth face was white as death, his eyes burning like black flame.

"And this is all you have to say?" he asked, hoarsely.

"All! Except that of all creatures on God's earth I despise Angus Torwood most."

She swept past him, gathering up her flowing skirts, as if to touch were contamination, and passed into the drawing-room. With a terrible oath, only half suppressed, he strode down stairs,

and five minutes afterward was dashing back to Torwoodtown, as if he and his horse had both gone mad.

Edith, entering the drawing-room, looked for Florence; but Florence was not there. Lucy turned her face from the piano in surprise.

"Has Mr. Torwood really gone, Edith? What makes you look so pale?"

"Mr. Torwood has gone," was the quiet answer. "Where is Florence?"

"I don't know; down-stairs somewhere, I think."

Edith turned and went down-stairs, and in the glance Dr. Stuart cast after her there was half amusement, half pity. On her way she met Madge.

"Have you see Florence?" she asked.

"Yes. La! how pale you are!"

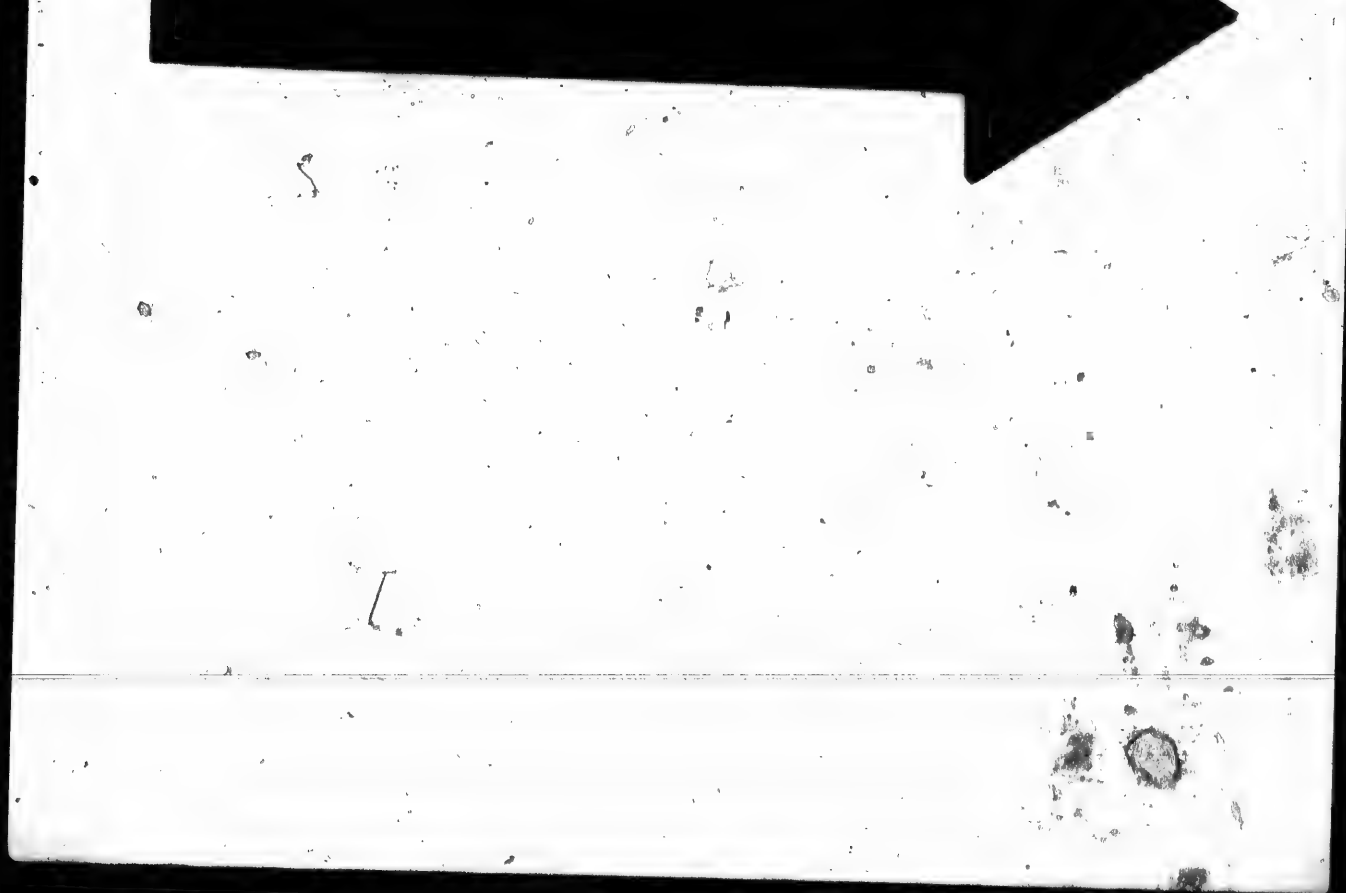
"Where is she?"

"Not three miles from the pantry. What ails you? You look like a ghost!"

But Edith was gone, making straight for the house-keeper's room, or what had been the house-keeper's room, when such a lady had been employed at Torwood Towers. The pantry door stood half open, and there sat Miss Florence before a little table, with a row of little plates before her, filled with pink slices of ham, morsels of cold chicken, delicate cuts of cake, and wedges of pies, so absorbed in gormandizing that she neither heard nor saw her watching sister. Anything less romantic could not have been imagined, and, in spite of everything that had passed that morning, something like a smile dawned on Edith's grave face. It was gone in a moment, and so was she, shut up in her own room with her own dreary thoughts.

It was a miserable day. The storm of wind and rain increased every hour, and lashed the windows ceaselessly. The dull moan of the sea was not more dismal than Edith's musings sitting at her storm-beaten window. She did not descend to dinner, and Lucy, ever thoughtful and anxious for others, brought up something on a tray; but Edith would not eat. She was waiting for St. Leon—she felt she could not rest again until she had told him all and heard his explanation. But the long day passed, and Mr. St. Leon did not come; evening, gray and eerie, fell, and still he was absent; night, black, wet, and wild, followed, and yet St. Leon was far away.

Kneeling down by her bedside that night to pray, Edith laid her sorrowful face on her pillow, and felt it grow wet with her tears. So long she knelt, that the dawn, lifting a leaden eye over the stormy sea, next morning, found her kneeling there still. As on the night of her arrival, Edith Torwood had cried herself to sleep like a child.





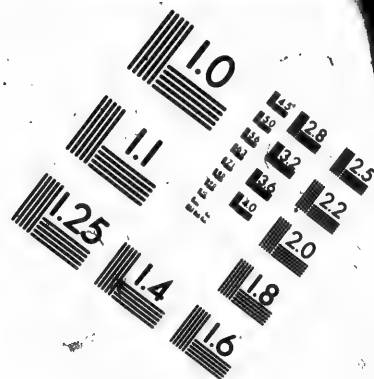
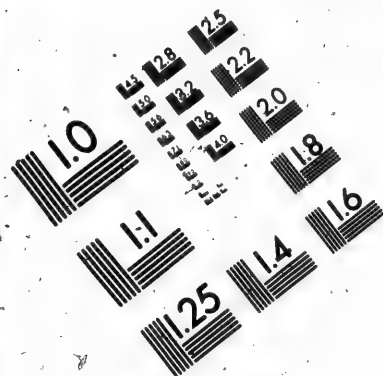
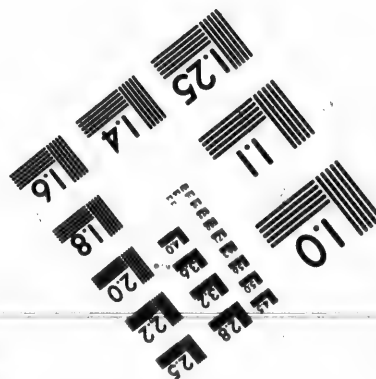
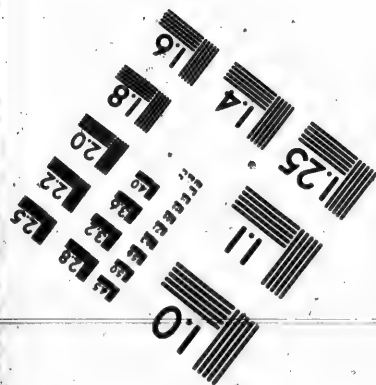
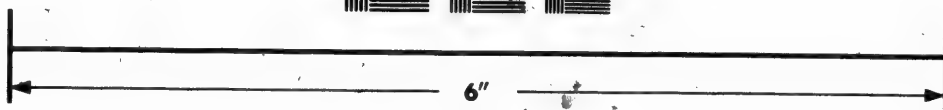
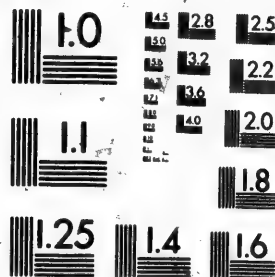


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CHAPTER XVI.

THE SHADOW OF WHAT WAS TO COME.

Who can account for presentiments—those strange foreshadowings of the future—those mysterious liftings for a second of the veil of futurity, that come sometimes to every human soul. Like comets, they come and go, and who can account for them. Truly, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.

Cold and cramped and unrefreshed, Edith Torwood arose from her comfortless resting-place, in the gray and dismal dawn of the next day. Bewildered at first at the strange position in which she found herself, she looked round the familiar room, only conscious of a dreary weight at her heart. It all came back to her in a moment—the miserable yesterday—and with a long, shivering sigh she arose and went to the window. Her sensitive, nervous temperament made her so acutely sensible to the weather's changes, that to her sunshine was a matter almost of life and death. No sunshine to-day, however. Yesterday's rain had ended, but left behind a leaden and lowering sky, a steaming and soaking earth, a gray and gloomy sea. Spiritlessly she turned from the dull prospect, and mechanically went through the business of her toilet and morning prayers, and then, sitting down

by the window, watched the dark and moaning sea, her thoughts far away.

The house was very still, but as her watch pointed to the hour of seven there was a tap at her door, and Lucy's quiet face looked in.

Edith turned her dark grave gaze from the window to the door, with no smile of greeting; gentle Lucy was no favorite of hers.

"May I come in?" the elder sister hesitatingly inquired.

"Certainly, Miss Torwood."

"Oh, Edith! not that," Lucy cried; "not Miss Torwood. Are we not sisters?"

"Will you be seated?" was Edith's cold answer, pointing to a chair.

"No, thank you. I scarcely have time. I only ran in going past to see if your headache was better."

Edith had forgotten the headache she had pleaded last evening—heartache would have been nearer the mark, and the pain was there still. She turned her dark face once more the sea to shut out the anxious look in Lucy's blue eyes.

"My headache is quite well."

"You do not look well, then. I am afraid you are homesick—pining for Cuba."

Oh, that word! It so vividly brought back all she had lost, that the pain at her heart nearly drove her wild. But in the averted face Lucy saw nothing. She stood looking at her with the air of one wishing to say something, and hesitating for fear of giving offense; and Edith noticing her silence, at length turned round, and read the look aright.

"You have something to say to me," she abruptly exclaimed; "What is it?"

"You will not be offended?"

"What is it?"

"Why did you not tell us yesterday your cousin, Angus was going away?"

"Going away!" Edith echoed; "has he——" gone she was going to say, but she checked herself in time.

"He went at noon yesterday in the steamer for Baltimore; I heard Doctor Stuart and Mr. St. Leon talking about it last night."

"Last night!" cried Edith facing round with sudden energy; "was Mr. St. Leon here last night?"

"Yes," said Lucy, quietly; he spent the evening here. I wished to let you know; but as you had a headache, he said he would not have you disturbed, and would call over early this morning again."

The powerful eyes of Edith were fixed in a strange intensity on her sister's face, and her face looked as if it were petrified in its severity, but she said nothing when Lucy ceased—only turned to the window again; and still Lucy lingered, with that look of something to say still.

"My dear," she began, with a face of absolute distress is her uncertainty, "I have something else to tell you, but——;" a pause, and Edith slowly turned her rigid face round to listen.

"What is it?"

"I am not sure that, I should tell you, and yet I think you ought to hear."

"Will you speak?" Edith cried, her voice so sharp and harsh with that inward pain that Lucy

scarcely knew it; or are you tormenting me on purpose? Speak out, I tell you; I am no child."

"It is this, then," said Lucy, her sweet tones in vivid contrast to the excited one of the other; "Mr. St. Leon and Mr. Torwood met before he went away, and quarreled, and——"

"Fought!" cried Edith, springing with a rebound to her feet; fought and——" Her whitening lips would not finish the sentence.

"And neither is hurt, at least, badly. Edith! oh, Edith! sit down, you will faint."

"Speak! speak! speak!" Edith shrilly cried; "speak, I tell you, or I shall die!"

"I will speak! I will tell you all—everything! only sit down."

She did sit down, but her wild, startled eyes never left Lucy's face. Long after, in the dark days to come, Lucy remembered that look—the wild, frightened look of a deer with the knife at its throat.

"This was the way of it," Lucy said, averting her own eyes from that burning intense stare. "I mean the way I heard it. Yesterday after Joe Jinks, who is hostler over at Torwoodtown Hotel, came here with oysters. I wanted to speak with him about something or other before he left, and went after him to the kitchen. He and our coachman, Peters, were alone there talking very earnestly, and from the first I became so interested that I involuntarily stopped to listen. Joe was speaking of Angus and Mr. St. Leon. I know he meant them, though he designated them as the 'black chap and t'other gent.'"

At any other time Edith would have smiled at

the gravely simple way Lucy repeated Mr. Jinks' epithets, but she was in anything but a smiling humor now, and held her breath in her earnestness, and Lucy went on :

"The black chap, he said, came riding home as if there were imps after him, some time in the morning, and immediately sought out Mr. St Leon, who was reading in the smoking-room. He, Joe, who chanced to be near the window, saw him throw a crumpled piece of pink paper at the other's feet, and begin using very abusive and violent language. Joe's description of his appearance to Pete was that he 'looked like Old Nick in a gale of wind,' but the other gent took it uncommonly easy, until the black chap, provoked at his calmness struck him across the face with his riding-whip."

There was a suppressed exclamation from Edith. Lucy waited for an instant and then went on :

"He got up, Joe said, at that, very pale, but quiet still, and said something to Mr. Torwood. Joe had caught none of the conversation, violent as it had been, and the two went up-stairs. Fifteen minutes after there was a report of two pistol shots in Mr. St Leon's room, and all rushed up in alarm to find out what was the matter. The door was locked, and while they were trying to burst it open, the key was turned, and Mr. St. Leon made his appearance, as self-possessed as ever, and requested him, Joe said, 'not to make such a confounded row.' Mr. Torwood was leaning against the opposite wall, his right arm hanging powerless by his side, but St. Leon was unhurt."

Still Edith did not speak—still that burning gaze

of inquiry was bent on Lucy, and Lucy composedly went on:

"Mr. Torwood's arm was broken, and Joe said if he had been Mr. St. Leon's brother he could not have been more anxious about him, but Angus would neither look at nor speak to him. The arm was set and bound up, and then, in spite of all persuasions, he took passage on board the steamer, and is by this time no doubt in Baltimore."

Lucy stopped with the air of one who had finished her story, and Edith, with that altered voice, spoke at last:

"And Mr. St. Leon was here last night. Does he bear the mark of Angus Torwood's blow?"

"Yes," said Lucy, coloring deeply, "there is a livid welt across his forehead. Madge asked him in her free way what he had been doing to himself, and he told her he had run his head against the telegraph wires as he came along."

"Who else in the house knows of this duel?"

"Dr. Stuart—no one else. I overheard," said Lucy, who seemed to have a knack of overhearing, "them talking about it as coolly as if it were the most matter of course occurrence in the world. 'I could have sent the bullet through his heart as easily as through his arm,' Mr. St. Leon said; 'but Torwood is too fine a fellow to kill, so I just winged him! I had to do that in self-defense, or he would have shot me as dead as a herring.'"

"Another question," said Edith, keeping that intense gaze on Lucy's face. "Does Dr. Stuart—do you—know the cause of all this?"

Lucy hesitated, and colored again.

"Yes, Edith—you are the cause."

"Have you anything else to tell me?"

"Nothing more! Have I done right in telling you this?"

"Quite right. I am much obliged to you. And now be good enough to leave me." •

"Will you come down to breakfast, or shall I send it up?"

"Thank you! I shall go down."

Lucy could linger no longer. She left the room, haunted by one dark figure, sitting with brooding eyes fixed steadily on the wide sea, and never seeing it. Lucy doubted much her coming down to breakfast, but come she did. It was a mere matter of form though; she ate nothing, but was listening all the time to a question her heart was asking: "Is there no one in all the world one can trust?" Angus, her brother Angus, unworthy; Florence, the sister beloved so well, treacherous; Giacomo, bound to her by strongest vows and promises, false—all alike deceitful.

She was just learning the lesson of life, you see, this haughty Edith, and found the alphabet, as we all find it, very bitter.

She looked across the table at Florence. How pretty she was, with that skin like pink and white wax, those delicate features, that shower of sparkling curls, those dark, soft eyes, like violet velvet, that little rosebud mouth, just showing the pearl white teeth. She was a beauty born, an empress of hearts from her cradle, and what were all Edith's talents, and cleverness, and pride, compared with that pink and white face and those yellow curls.

There was a mirror over the mantel opposite—she looked at herself, and started to see a sunken-cheeked, hollow-eyed vision, plainer than plain Edith Torwood ever was before. One day of suffering could work greater change in one of the sensitive nervous temperament of Edith than weeks could do with the phlegmatic, sanguine Florence.

No one spoke of St. Leon, all were very silent, and Edith, fancied, with an intolerable sense of humiliation, that she read pity in every glance cast upon her. She would rather they had struck her, and she arose from the table in a horrible state of bitterness and resentment against them and all mankind.

"This day must end it," she said through her closed teeth; "this day his own lips shall deny or confirm the charge. He cannot, he dare not lie to me! Let him take Florence if he wants her; I would tear my heart out sooner than marry him, with another preferred before me."

She went out on the piazza, feeling she could not stay in the same room with Florence. Some one followed her, and turning she saw Madge.

"Look here, Edith," that young person began in her abrupt way, "why didn't you come down-stairs last night?"

"Was I wanted?" Edith said, with cold scorn.

"Yes, you were," said Madge, bluntly; "wanted very much. I have just one thing to say to you, Miss Edith Torwood, and you may get mad at it if you like, for some folks never have gumption enough to know their friends when they meet them. The thing's this—you're always wanted when that Mr.

Jackeymo St. Leon is here—wanted particularly—mind that.”

“With a shower of mysterious nods Madge darted away. Edith had scarcely heard her parting words; she was watching a horseman riding leisurely down the bridle path. A few minutes brought him to the court-yard, a few more to the piazza where Edith still stood, and he was holding out his hand to her, and looking at the altered face.

“Well,” was his greeting, “I should like to know what Miss Edith Torwood has been about for the last day or two to change her to a living skeleton. They told me you had a headache—not that you were at death’s door.”

The meeting was not very lover like, but their meetings never were that. Earnestly she looked up in his handsome face, so frank, so bright, so beautiful with “man’s best beauty,” and “Oh!” cried an inward voice she longed to believe, “he is true; you have been frightening yourself in vain. All the world may be false, but Giacomo is true!” How could she think at that moment, of the dreary old adage, “How fair an outside falsehood hath.”

“Well, my dear, you do not speak, and you stare at me as if I were a live kangaroo. What may that solemn, searching look mean, pray?”

“I am looking at that bruise on your forehead; how did you get it?”

“That,” he said, lifting his straw hat coolly, and brushing back his luxuriant dark hair, “that is nothing, only a scratch.”

“It is something more, I think. Giacomo, you have been quarreling.”

"Have I? Who told *you* that, mademoiselle?"

"A little bird, perhaps. Why did you fight with Angus Torwood?"

"For a very good reason—because I could not help it. I don't see how you found out anything about it; but since you have, I suppose you know that beauty-spot is the mark of his horsewhip."

"I don't know it," said Edith, almost astonished, well as she was used to him, at the admirable coolness with which he spoke of it. "What did you quarrel about?"

Mr. St. Leon leaned over the piazza rails to nod familiarly with Dr. Stuart passing below.

"About you, my dear. Torwood's an odd sort of genius always, but I never took him to be quite cracked until yesterday. I say, Stuart, we will have to postpone our fishing excursion to-day, won't we? Confound the weather."

Dr. Stuart did not reply; he only lifted his hat to Edith, and walked away.

"What did he do yesterday? Attend to me if you please, Mr. St. Leon, and never mind Dr. Stuart."

"Beg your pardon, Edith. He was here yesterday morning, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Well, his visit did not tend to sweeten his temper, however you all treated him here. He returned in a most ferocious mood, began calling me a select litany of hard names, accused me of falsehood and treachery and making love to your pretty sister, Florence, and of perpetrating all sorts of horrors, in short; and finding he could not irritate me for I flatter myself I have too much sense to get up

steam to such a high pressure about anything in this hum-drum world, ended by giving me a blow with his whip. Of course, after that there was but one way of acting; we took it; fired across the table; he got his arm shattered; I escaped unhurt, and am here to tell the tale: and so, my dear—*finis*.”

All the time he was talking Edith was watching him. No, there was no trace of guilt in that handsome, careless face, in that composed voice, in that serene manner. Her heart smote her with remorse for the injustice she had done him, and she held out her hand to him with a little penitent cry.

“Oh, Giacomo! how I *have* been wronging you, and how miserable I have been! Can you ever forgive me?”

“For what, my dear?”

“I thought—they made me believe you—you—oh, I am ashamed to tell you!—that you were false, that you cared for Florence, and not for me.”

“Pooh! how could you be such a goose, Edith! Florence, indeed! It is some of Mr. Angus Torwood’s handiwork, I suppose.”

“Do you forgive me?”

“To be sure, and him too. He was jealous, poor fellow, and a jealous man is equal to anything. Florence is a very fine girl, an extensive armful of beauty, rather on the Dutch scale, perhaps, but——” a shrug and a slight lift of the eyebrows finished the sentence. “Come into the drawing-room, and let us have some music. The Queen of Sheba is not down stairs yet, I hope?”

“Who?”

"Oh, Madame Torwood! that most awful of womankind! Come, I am dying to hear '*La ci darem!*'"

Florence only was in the drawing-room and she turned crimson at their entrance. Edith pitied her. "He is so handsome," she thought, "and Florence is only a child—I understand it all now." Mr. St. Leon merely bowed to the younger sister, and stood devotedly at the piano while Edith played and sang as even Edith never played and sang before. It charmed Madame Torwood down from her room, it charmed Lucy from her housekeeping, Madge from her dogs and horse, and Dr. Stuart from his book and morning constitutional. Once again Edith was happy; but in Dr. Stuart's blue eyes, genial and kindly, the look of pity was deeper than ever.

Before noon the weather cleared, and the gentlemen discovered they could go on their fishing excursion after all—and went. Edith followed them to the piazza, the chill feeling of presentiment returning strangely again.

"You will be back to-morrow?" she said, wistfully holding out her hand.

He lifted it to his lips.

"Could I stay away if I tried? Adieu, and *au revoir!*"

She stood on the piazza and watched them out of sight, then strolled into the grounds for a walk. Aimlessly she turned into the dark shrubbery, and as she neared its darkest and loneliest part, she heard voices among the trees.

"To-morrow, then," said a low voice she did not recognize.

"Yes, to-morrow; and, oh, dear me! I feel so nervous about it," said a second voice, the voice of Florence.

There was a rustling of bushes as she spoke, and out from among the trees Florence herself came, and stood face to face with Edith. There was nothing very startling, one would think, in such an encounter; certainly she was not parting with Mr. St. Leon this time; but if ever any one showed guilt in every feature, that one was Florence. From scarlet she turned white, and then scarlet again, shrinking away in such visible affright that Edith looked at her in utmost wonder.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked.

"You—you startled me so," was the confused reply, and, without looking up, she turned and walked rapidly away.

"Who could her companion have been?" thought Edith. "This is all rather mysterious. It certainly was not the voice of a man."

She parted the bushes and looked in, but no one was visible. The flutter of a black skirt on the distant beach caught her eye, but it was only Madge, singing one of her odd snatches of song:

"Bind the sea to slumber stilly,
Bind its odor to the lily,
Bind the aspen ne'er to quiver,
Then bind love to last forever!"

That cold, chilling presentiment once more! What was there in Madge's gay voice to awaken it?

"Pshaw!" Edith said to herself, impatiently, "what a simpleton I am!"

And so she wandered up and down for over an hour, trying to think she was happy and satisfied, and her mutinous heart giving her the lie all the time. What was Florence going to do to-morrow? to whom had she been talking? and why that guilty look? Edith went back to the house without finding an answer to her own questions, and dressed for dinner.

As she descended to the dining-room, Madge came behind her, singing again, this time the fag-end of an old French ballad.

"To-day for me,
To-morrow for thee,
But will that to-morrow ever be!"

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" repeated Edith, mentally; "why does that word haunt me so? Who knows what to-morrow may bring forth?"

Who, indeed? Well for her she did not know, as her appetite for dinner would have been as poor as at breakfast. It haunted her all the evening, haunted her to her room, haunted her at her prayers, haunted her to her pillow.

"To-morrow! to-morrow!" she kept inwardly reiterating, and with that momentous little word still in her heart and on her lips, Edith fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

WHAT CAME.

IN the staid and prim parlor of that staid and prim house adjoining that staid and prim building, the Presbyterian meeting-house, the Rev. Alexander McPherson sat at dinner. The reverend gentleman kept early hours, as you know, and though the hands of the town clock had not yet touched ten, Mr. McPherson's appetite was six hours old, and in excellent order. He had just sat down, gone through a brief grace, spread his napkin, and was seizing vigorously the carving-knife and fork, when an authoritative knock sounded at the hall door.

Mr. McPherson paused, with the carving knife brandished over the smoking joint, and presently the old housekeeper made her appearance ushering in a visitor. The minister, from the loudness of the knock, had been expecting Miss Madge Torwood; but it was a gentleman this time, a tall, young, and gracious gentleman.

"Oh, it's only you!" exclaimed the clergyman, looking relieved, and beginning to carve. "I expected a lady. Find a chair, will you, and draw it over—my old lady will find another plate and knife and fork."

"Thank you," said Dr. Stuart, who chanced to be

the visitor, removing his gloves. "So you have ladies to visit you, do you? Young or old?"

"Both. Madge Torwood comes sometimes. What brings Dr. Stuart to town this morning?"

"You never would guess what! I am trying my hand as an amateur detective, and am on the trail of two certain people. I missed what I came for, though."

"What was that?"

"A wedding! I'll tell you all about it by and by. I am too hungry to talk at present. It's luncheon hour over at the Towers, and 'my lady' and pretty Mistress Lucy, not to speak of the other angels, residing there, will wonder what has become of me."

"It won't take away their appetite, I hope. Is it any harm to ask how you are progressing?"

"In what way?"

"Have you proposed for any of the Misses Torwood yet?"

"Not yet. I am afraid I am bashful. Proposing is an awful piece of business to a timid fellow like myself."

The laughing face and roguish blue eyes confronting the divine certainly showed little evidence of bashfulness. Mr. McPherson granted expressively:

"Time is on the wing, young man, and other suitors may not be so dilatory. There's that St. Leon—he is going to carry off one; here am I bent on carrying off another; so only two will be left. You'll put your foot in it, my young friend, if you are not careful."

"And lose that grand fortune the late Judge Torwood—rest his soul!—left me. That would never

do. I must screw my courage to the sticking point somehow before long. It's a fearful trial, though."

"And what does Lucy Torwood say?"

"Lots of things. The fact is, she is getting tired of saying, and is beginning to give me up in despair. Oh, it's of no use; I must be up and doing! I think I shall begin at the eldest, and go through the four with the same question; surely, one out of so many will accept."

"You had better not ask Lucy. I have a prior claim, remember."

"Should be happy to oblige you, my dear sir, but in this matter you ~~must~~ excuse me. Lucy is so much at home in Torwood Towers it would be a pity to take her out of it."

"Look here, Stuart," said Mr. McPherson, changing his tone suddenly, and leaning across the table; "is it true that Angus Torwood has left?"

"Quite true."

"And that he and St. Leon fought a duel before leaving about—about a certain young lady?"

"Yes."

"You were out fishing with St. Leon yesterday weren't you?"

"I was."

"You are very great friends, I suppose?"

"Very—thick as pickpockets."

"Might one venture to ask your opinion of the young gentleman?"

"Yes and take your answer in two words—unmitigated scoundrel."

"Help yourself to potatoes! An unmitigated

scoundrel! Dear me! are you not a little severe, Dr. Stuart?"

"Giacomo St. Leon is an unmitigated scoundrel," Dr. Stuart repeated, "and he knows it himself, and knows that I know it!"

"And yet you are friends?"

"Are we? I wish you had heard us yesterday over our hooks and lines. 'I know I am acting like a villain, for whom hanging would be a thousand times too good,' owned Mr. St. Leon, with charming frankness; 'but it is my destiny, and I must go on.' You see, the fellow is a fatalist, and he believes that what is to be will be."

"And you? Are you a fatalist, too?"

Dr. Stuart's face deepened in its gravity.

"I am a Christian, Mr. McPherson, as I hope you know; and believe in Providence, not in fate."

There was silence for a moment, both looked serious, and Dr. Stuart had dropped for once his mocking tone and doubtful smile.

"Knowing all this," said Mr. McPherson, "I do not see how you can reconcile it with your conscience to be his friend."

"My dear sir, I never said I was his friend. It was yourself. I should be sorry to be a friend of his."

"You are often with him, then."

"Oh, to be sure! He interests me as something new and piquant, and I have been before now in the society of the most notorious blacklegs of New York, and enjoyed it much. I have a low taste, I am afraid, for such vulgar studies from nature."

"Dr. Paul Stuart," said Mr. McPherson, laying

down his knife and fork with emphasis," you are not a good man, you are not a conscientious man, or you never would let Edith Torwood become his wife."

"My very dear sir," said the doctor, a smile breaking the stern gravity of his face, "how could I help it?"

"You could tell her what you have told me."

"She would not listen; she would not believe."

"She might; she is a sensible girl."

"Fearfully so, on every point, but this."

"It is your duty to try."

"And be laughed at for my pains."

"Be it so; a laugh will not hurt you, and you will have done your duty."

"But Mr. St. Leon told me in confidence that he was a villain," said the young doctor, looking amused; "would it be honorable?"

"Honor among thieves! I have only one thing to say to you, Dr. Stuart—you are as great a villain as he, if you do not try your best to prevent this marriage."

"My good friend," said Dr. Stuart, rising from the table, "be easy; this marriage will never take place!"

"No? and why?"

"For the very best reason in the world."

"What is it?"

"Will you promise not to faint if I tell you?"

"I'll do my best—go on!"

"Then Giacomo St. Leon will not marry Edith Torwood, because he is married already."

"What?" cried the minister, in shrill consternation.

"There you go! I told you to keep cool! Yes, sir, Mr. St. Leon was married this morning, in the Episcopal Church, and by the Episcopal clergyman of Torwoodtown."

"To whom?" Mr. McPherson was just able to gasp.

"To Florence Torwood, third daughter of the late Judge Torwood, of Torwood Towers."

"Mr. McPherson did not speak; he could not; he sat perfectly dumb, only staring in hopeless consternation at the composed speaker."

Dr. Stuart laughed at his horror-struck face.

"Don't look so utterly dazed, my dear sir! Did you never before hear of a gentleman being engaged to one lady and marrying another? Besides, you might have foreseen this."

Mr. McPherson, finding breath at last, took out his snuff-box, drew up about twice the usual supply, and fortified by its pungency, was able to speak once more.

"And how many know of this?" he demanded.

"Let me see," said the doctor, beginning to reckon on his fingers, "one, two, three, four, five, six. Six people, I believe."

"Is Edith Torwood one of the six?"

"No indeed. Mr. and Mrs. St. Leon make two (or did before they were made one), I am three, you are four, and the clergyman five, and one other person, six!"

"Don't be mysterious. Who is the other person?"

"Never mind," said Dr. Stuart, the doubtful smile dawning on his face again; "perhaps you may learn that one day. But, you see, Miss Edith is never

likely to be St. Leon's wife, since he has taken to his bosom the fair, the fat, the fascinating Florence."

The minister took snuff a second time.

"Bless my soul! I never was so amazed. And what a scene there will be when that hot-blooded Edith hears it."

"No, I think not. Edith Torwood might make a scene about other things, not about this. She is by far too proud to wear her heart on her sleeve for daws to peck at."

"You begin to admire her a little, I think."

"I admire her more than a little."

"It has lately come to you, then."

"By no means. I admired her from the first, but did not quite understand her."

"You understand her now?"

"I think so. She is what you said she was one evening at the Towers—a fine girl."

"Dr. Stuart!" exclaimed Mr. McPherson, "you have made your choice among the sisters!"

"I have," replied Dr. Stuart, serenely.

"And it is not Lucy?"

"No; it is Edith."

Mr. McPherson leaned back in his chair, and took snuff for the third time.

"The very last one of all," he murmured, helplessly, "I should have suspected."

"Of course. We always do marry the very last person our friends would have expected."

"But she won't have you!" cried Mr. McPherson, triumphantly.

"Won't she? Don't be too sure of that. Time works wonders."

"Besides, she will be sick of all mankind after this. You take a very poor time for proposing."

"That shows how little you know of human hearts! Hearts, like balls, are to be caught on the rebound."

"What will she say when she finds out that you have deceived her?"

"I have not deceived her."

"Yes, you have. You knew of St. Leon's falsehood, and yet kept it secret."

"She will thank me for it some day when she awakes from her delusions, and comes to her right senses."

"That is, when she is Mrs. S.!"

"Very likely; better be that than Madame St. Leon! Besides, my dear fellow, what good would come of my telling? It would have prevented nothing that has occurred. I helped nothing on—I merely stood still, and let events take their course."

"And a sweet course they have taken. What is to be the next move in the game?"

"My next move must be for Torwood Towers," said Dr. Stuart, pulling out his watch; "that of Mr. and Mrs. St. Leon will probably be to absquatulate."

"And Florence forfeits her share of her father's money. That will be a loss."

"It might be to common mortals, but they will never think of it, you know. They will live on love, and all that sort of thing!"

"Humph! we have a proverb in Scotland: 'A kiss and a drink of water make but a poor break-

fast !' Love is very unsubstantial diet—Florence will get thin on it, I am afraid."

Dr. Stuart laughed, and put on his hat.

"When are we to see your reverence at the Towers?"

"Not until the gale blows over, I think. Torwood Towers will be a home of discord only for awhile, I dare say."

"To one, perhaps. Well, good-morning."

"One parting question," said Mr. McPherson, producing his snuff-box for the fourth time; "when do you propose for Edith?"

Dr. Stuart had his hand on the door-knob, but he turned round again.

"Did you see the new moon last night?" was his seemingly irrelevant question.

"I don't know. Was there a new moon?"

"Yes; and before that new moon wanes Edith Torwood either shall say yes or no. Good-morning, sir."

After which Dr. Stuart rode home, his conscience relieved by an open confession. As he rode up the front avenue, he overtook an equestrienne riding even more slowly than himself. Not Madge—Madge never rode a white horse—never rode any horse black or white, at that funeral pace, and did not affect bright blue riding-habits. The equestrienne turned round, and under the brim of a white straw hat, shaded by plumes of white and azure, he saw a lovely young face, fresh, rosy, and blooming as another Hebe's; all the tinseled gold ringlets, braided, and twisted, and knotted back, seeing that curls under a riding-habit was an abomination; the

plump, rounded form set off by the blue habit, the pretty hands adorned with buff gauntlets—a picture altogether bright as a poet's vision. Dr. Stuart lifted his hat, and bent to his saddle bow.

"Good-morning, Miss Florence—it is something new to find you on horseback. Been to town?"

"Yes," said Florence, and up to her temples rose the guilty blood again.

"A delightful morning for such a canter. Permit me to assist you."

He lifted her from the saddle, and, only too glad to escape, Florence ran up the piazza steps. There another disagreeable encounter awaited her. Edith stood on the piazza, in dinner costume, a book in her hand, waiting—waiting for one who would not come—who never would come again. But Florence did not wait to be addressed; she scarcely looked at her as she hurried by and entered the house. Dr. Stuart might have been more polite, but Edith's eyes dropped on her book at his approach, and never lifted, as she bent her head at his greeting. Rather discouraging, perhaps, for a man who had announced his intention of marrying her; but Dr. Stuart was not easily discouraged, and went into the dining room whistling a tune.

All the rest of the afternoon the doctor covertly watched Edith, and Edith watched openly for some one who did not come. Lamp-light hour came, and Edith was at the piano, her restless fingers wandering aimlessly over the keys, a feverish fire of expectation burning in her eyes and cheeks. Florence was there, too, holding a book in which she seemed utterly absorbed, quite unconscious of the fact that she

was holding it upside down. So, while Edith played, and Florence read, and Dr. Stuart watched, all were thinking of the same individual, who probably at that very time was serenely smoking his cheroots, and wondering what his destiny had in store for him next.

Eleven struck from the hall clock. Susie, the colored chambermaid, came in with a tray of bed-room candlesticks, good-night was said, and the family at Torwood Towers separated for the night.

Twelve struck, and all were, or should have been, in bed; but in one room a girl was walking up and down, up and down, with a wild, strange fire burning in her dark eyes; in another room a fairer girl, shawled and hooded, sat, watch in hand, counting the minutes; while a third figure, not at all girlish was out on the piazza, watching the stars, and waiting for what was to come.

The night was clear, and still, and bright; the sounds of silence—the slipping of a snake, the cracking of a dry branch, the chirping of the birds in their nests, the dull, regular splash of the waves on the shore, the slow murmur of the night air in the trees, the ticking of the old hall clock—all were distinctly audible to the figure standing in the shadow of the piazza pillars—waiting—waiting. One o'clock—two o'clock, and then his vigil was over. He had heard something—the sound of wheels; he had seen something—a shawled and hooded figure flit like a guilty ghost out of the front door, down the stairs, and disappear into the night, and then he came in.

The hall lamp shone for a moment on a pale face—pale with watching in the night air, perhaps;

but he was half-smiling, half talking to himself for all.

"So the second act of the drama is over," he was soliloquizing—"first, marriage—then elopement. The third, the last, the great *dénouement*, is to come yet. Won't there be the dickens to pay to-morrow morning?"

Three, four, five, six! The old clock, with its sonorous voice, tolled the hours, as it had tolled them for fifty years, and a new day had dawned on the world.

Dr. Stuart was up with the sun, scarcely wearing so fresh and florid a complexion as that luminary, though. As he paced up and down the courtyard, he cast occasional glances up at the windows of the sleeping chambers occupied by the young ladies. The blinds were down in the rooms of Edith and Florence, but while he looked Lucy's window opened, and Lucy's pretty face smiled good-morning. Five minutes after there was a merry shout on the piazza, and Madge came bounding down, with Sancho, as usual, gamboling furiously around her.

"Where now, Donna Quixote?" he asked.

"Everywhere. I think I'll run over to Torwoodtown, and blow up Mr. Jackeymo St. Leon for not being here yesterday. Anybody could see Edith was fidgeting to death about it. Oh, what a nice thing it must be to get in love! Come along, Sancho."

Madge was out of sight directly, but she did not go all the way to Torwoodtown, for she was back at the breakfast hour, with her spirits and appetite greatly improved—neither for that matter, standing

much in need of improvement. The doctor escorted her to the dining-room, where Edith sat alone; and a moment after Lucy entered, with a servant behind her, bearing coffee and toast.

"Have any of you good people seen Florence this morning?" she asked. "She is not in the house, and it is the first time since her return she has been out of it before breakfast. I have been to her room, and she is not there."

"Did you look in the pantry, Lucy?" demanded pert Madge, and the doctor smiled at her characteristic remark.

"For shame, Madge! Did she sleep with you last night Edith?"

"No."

"It's very odd! Well, Susie, what do you want?"

"Please, Miss Lucy," said the chambermaid, presenting a letter, "Miss Floy gave me this yer last night, and told me to give it to you this morning at breakfast."

Was it some presentiment of what it contained that made Lucy turn suddenly white? Madge and Edith stared, and the doctor drew a long breath, as if bracing himself for the scene to come.

"Gave you this last night?" faltered Lucy. "At what time? What did she say?"

"After all you was to bed, Miss Floy she rung her bell, and I went up, and then she gave me this letter, and told me I was to hand it to you, Miss Lucy, at breakfast, and then she shut her door, and I don't know nothin' more 'tall about it."

"Open it, Lucy! Open it!" cried Madge, quite

curiously. "Clear out, Susie! What on earth has Florence been up to now?"

Lucy did open the letter, but her hands shook while doing it. Two minutes after it had dropped on the floor and with a shrill scream her hands flew up and covered her white face.

"La!" cried Madge, her black eyes starting to that degree in her astonishment that there seemed some danger of their dropping out on the carpet. "What is the matter? May I read this, Lucy?"

But Lucy did not, seemingly could not, speak, so great was the first shock. She had sunk into a chair, her face still hidden in her hands, and Madge, taking silence for assent picked up the fallen document. It was short, sharp, and decisive, a model of sensible composition.

"MY DEAR LUCY :—" I address you, being the elder, and the only one under the circumstances I can very well address. I was married yesterday to Mr. St. Leon, and will leave here with him to-night to avoid a fuss. I beg you will not make a time about this, and Edith may as well take it quietly, because being angry and scolding will do no good now. I could not help being prettier than she is, and having Mr. St. Leon like me better, and so you may tell her. Of course I must leave my trunks and things behind for the present, but when Giacomo and I get settled I will send you my address and you can forward them. Don't let Madge get at my dresses or she will spoil them, she is so rough; and tell Dr. Stuart that I hope he will not be mean enough to keep my share of the legacy because I could not marry him. I declare I am real glad to get away from Torwood Towers, for it's the most dismal old place I ever saw. Good-by, my dear

Lucy ; I will write to you again as soon as possible, and be sure you send me everything.

"Your affectionate sister,

"FLORENCE ST. LEON.

"P. S.—Is not the name pretty ? I entreat you will not let Madge in my room, as she is sure to spoil everything she lays her hands on."

Madge read the letter over twice—at first incredulously, then with a horrible sense of its truth. Before she came to the end the second time her honest face was absolutely purple with suppressed rage. Of all her presentiments of impending danger, she had dreamed of nothing so bad as this, and she crumpled the missive up in her hand, and glared vindictively around her.

"If I only had a hold of her!" said Madge, clawing the air viciously with her other hand, "I'd teach her whether I spoiled everything I laid my hands on! The mean, treacherous, deceitful——"

"Madge!" Edith suddenly said, rising, "what has Florence done? what is that letter about?"

Madge had forgotten Edith. Lucy had not, and she arose too, white with dismay.

"Oh, Edith! how shall we tell you? how shall we tell you?"

The fire that intense excitement lighted in Edith's eyes was burning there now, as she resolutely held out her hand.

"Give me the letter?"

Madge looked appealingly at Lucy: but Lucy, wringing her hands, could offer no suggestion.

"Take it then," exclaimed Madge in desperation ;

"and if I could choke the pair of them I would do it with the greatest pleasure."

With the letter in her hand, Edith crossed over to one of the windows, and Dr. Stuart, looking very grave, arose to quit the room. Lucy turned imploringly to him her white and frightened face.

"I think we had all better leave her alone for a while," he said in passing, and Lucy, beckoning to Madge, followed him out on the piazza. But Madge's curiosity prompted her to linger at the door, and she saw the letter read once, twice, three times, while the dark figure at the window stood as still as if carved in stone.

"Madge," Lucy said, "come away!" And Madge came over to where Lucy stood, trembling and pale, and, holding on by the railing, began, from sheer inability to keep quiet, a little hornpipe of anxiety. So half an hour passed in total silence, then Madge could hold in no longer.

"Look here, Lucy! are we to stand here all day, I want to know?"

"Oh, Madge! we can't go in while Edith is there. I am afraid."

Madge went over on tiptoe and peeped through the dining-room window.

"She isn't there, she's gone? The coast's clear—come along!"

Yes, Edith had gone, and the three sat down to breakfast and rose again, with everything almost untasted. Madge started off immediately, and announced her intention of dining with Mr. McPherson, and not returning until night. Dr. Stuart accompanied her, and Lucy was left alone in a state

of miserable anxiety not to be described. Once during the course of the day she ventured up to Edith's room, and listened at the door, but the silence of the grave reigned within. She had even ventured in her terror to turn the handle and look in; yes, Edith was there, sitting by the window, her hands tightly locked together in her lap, and the letter clasped between them, her face turned to the sea. Lucy could not see it, and not daring to speak, she stole out again, and left the lonely watcher to keep her vigil undisturbed.

Next morning, in passing from her own chamber down-stairs, Lucy ventured to look in again. The pale shadow in black sat by the window still, as if she had never once moved—as if she had sat there through the livelong night.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE INVALID.

DR. PAUL STUART, according to custom, standing on the piazza before breakfast that morning, felt himself touched lightly on the arm, and looking round saw the anxious face of Lucy Torwood.

"Dr. Stuart," she hurriedly began, "what shall I do about Edith? I have nobody to advise me, and I declare I am worried nearly to death about this wretched business."

She looked it; a more troubled and distressed countenance than that uplifted pleadingly to his the young doctor had seldom seen.

"It is a wretched business indeed," he gravely said. "In what way can I be of service to you, Miss Torwood?"

"I don't know what to do about Edith. She sat in her room all yesterday, and never ate a mouthful. She sat up all night without once going asleep, I am sure; and who is to tell she may not do the same to-day? She will kill herself if she keeps on, and I don't know what to do."

Lucy was twisting her fingers and looking as if about to cry, and the heartless young doctor had some difficulty to repress a smile at her distress.

"Why do you not go and speak to her, then?"

"Dr. Stuart, I am afraid."

"Of what?"

"Of her; she is so—so passionate; and I know she feels so deeply on this point."

"It is probable she does. Still I see nothing for it but to

'Beard the lion in his den,
The Douglas in his hall,'

and Miss Edith in her room. Suppose you step up and ask her to come down to breakfast."

There was no way to avoid it, Lucy saw, and with that same air of hopeless distress, she turned away and went slowly up-stairs to her unwelcome task. At the door she had to pause, unable for some time to summon courage to knock; then, in sheer desperation, and with a fast beating heart, she rapped. She did not expect an answer, but to her surprise the door opened and Edith stood before her.

The girl was wrapped in a large shawl, and was shivering under it, though the morning was sultry; her face was set and stony, her large black eyes looked unnaturally large and luminous, with dark circles under them, and the compressed lips and bent brow told their own tale of bitter endurance. It was plain to see the first shock was over, and that in the long and lonely watch of that dreary last night she had formed some resolution, whether of forgiveness or revenge she best knew. Wrapped in the shawl, and holding the door handle, she stood looking at her sister out of those weird, spectral eyes, solemn and silent.

Lucy, in a violent tremor, essayed once or twice to speak, faltered, and broke down. Naturally timid

and shrinking, Lucy had always felt a dread of this dark, fierce Creole, and now, in her bereavement, she stood before her as she might have before a half tamed tigress robbed of her young.

"You will not be angry, Edith, but I——"

Edith suddenly lifted her hand, and interrupted :

"One moment, if you please. I do not know what you are going to say ; but I give you warning beforehand, not to say one word of what is past and gone. More—I never want to hear those names from you or any one in this house ; if I do, I shall leave it five minutes after, and forever. Now, go on with what you came to say."

"I had no intention of saying one word about——" Lucy broke down. "I only came to ask you to take some breakfast. If you will not come down, I will fetch it up here."

"You need not. I will go down. Have you anything more to say to me?"

There were a thousand things Lucy would like to have said, but she dared not utter one. Sorrowfully she turned away.

"I will go down," Edith repeated, closing the door, "as soon as the bell rings."

Whatever Lucy had looked for from Edith, she had not expected this ominous calm, and it filled her with more foreboding than any violence could have done. Madge had joined Dr. Stuart in the dining-room, and Lucy related the short interview that had taken place, and repeated Edith's warning.

"La !" cried Madge, with an impatient jerk of her shoulders, "she might have spared herself the trouble ! I am sure we'll be hard up for something

to say when we want to talk about that disgraceful, misbehaved pair, Mr. and Mrs. St. Leon."

The breakfast bell rang during this outburst, and before its last sound died away Edith quietly walked into the room. Her toilet was as carefully made, her hair as daintily arranged, her manner as composed as they had ever seen it; but there was that in her face that would have warned them not to trust too far to this quietude, even if her own lips had not done so already. Except that they were all very still and silent, saying what was said in very low voices, everything was just the same as ever. Just the same as ever, too, Edith sat down at the sweet-toned old parlor organ when it was over, and played the airs she loved so well, from Beethoven, so sweet, so solemn, so sad. Then, still the same as ever, she selected a book, put on her straw hat, and went out into the grounds for a morning walk.

And so it was all over, the worst had arrived, and nothing was to come of it after all. Madge felt cheated, and made no secret of her disappointment.

"To think!" resentfully broke out the youngest Miss Torwood, "that she should take that mean Florence at her word, and make no fuss after all. If she were made of milk and water, like Lucy now, nobody would wonder; but such a fire-eater as we all took her to be. Oh! if I were in her place, what a jolly row there would have been!"

"What would you have done?" inquired Dr. Stuart.

"Ah! you would like to know, wouldn't you?" said Madge, with a shower of mysterious nods; "just you try the same dodge with me, and you'll

find out ! How I should admire to have Jackeymo St. Leon's beautiful face within reach of my nails for about ten minutes—that's all ! But, then, I always knew how it would be. What good could be expected from a man with such a name as that ? ”

“ Her quietness is the strangest thing of all,” said Lucy, uneasily ; “ she can't have cared so much for Mr. St. Leon as we would have thought.”

Dr. Stuart smiled to himself at his own thoughts, but said nothing.

“ It isn't that,” said Madge, who was ever ready with her own opinion, “ but she's a Torwood, and consequently too plucky to wear her heart on her sleeve. Even you, Lucy, though you do appear as meek as a new-born kitten, if you were jilted, would feel the Torwood spirit burning within you ; and, as for me—but the English language is too weak to express what I would do in such a case ! ”

So Lucy, and Madge, and Dr. Stuart, each with her or his own thoughts of Edith, went about their daily occupations, and Edith, proud as a Spartan, kept her thoughts to herself. In one thing Madge was right. Edith was not one to wear her heart on her sleeve ; she would rather have been struck in the face than pitied. But she suffered physically and mentally ; they all could see that.

During the days that followed, and many did follow, in one of her late evening rambles among the rank herbage of the shrubbery, some breath of miasma, lurking in the low swampy meadows, had entered her lungs, and from that time her veins were filled with a low consuming fever that was slowly burning her life away. All the life, all the spirit, all

the energy she had ever possessed was eaten away by the low fire of fever. Languid of step, dull of eye, listless of motion, faint of voice, she wandered from room to room of the old house, the shadow of her former self. Another fever came with it, a desperate longing for home, for her sunny Cuba, that tortured her day and night. If she could only wander under the orange trees, and feel their scented breath on her wan cheek; if she could only sit in the tropical sunshine once more, she felt she might be well. But she was too weak to have gone, were it even in her power, so the listless days and sleepless nights were wearing on, and with them, Edith was wearing away like the waning moon.

They were all very kind and gentle with her now; even Madame Torwood was tender with the pale, weak girl, who never complained. Lucy was the most devoted of nurses, anticipating her every wish. Madge did what she could, did her best, and, alas for poor madcap Madge, that best was not much.

"I wish I could do something, you know," she said, pathetically in confidence to Dr. Stuart, "but I can't. I try not to bounce and slam doors, and not talk in a voice pitched at the top of the octave; but law! what good does that do Edith? I don't believe there ever was such another rough, boisterous, hateful creature as I am."

But of all who were kind to the Creole none did so much as Dr. Stuart. The rare bouquets that every day found their way to her room, the numberless magazines, books, music, delicate fruit, and countless trifles, small in themselves, but all by some strange magnetism the very things she had been

wishing for, came from him. She did not know this at first; but one day when Madge came up-stairs, with an unusually gorgeous bouquet of hot-house flowers, Edith, lying wearily on a lounge, rose up on her elbow, her dull eyes sparkling with some of their old luster.

"How beautiful! how fragrant! I was just wishing for violets! Madge," impetuously, "where do all these lovely flowers come from?"

Madge placed them in a porcelain vase with care, and stepped back to see the effect.

"From my castle in Spain; there's a patch of ground at the back of the castle where such trifles grow of themselves. Perfectly mag, ain't they?"—that being short for magnificent.

"Madge, I half suspect, but I want to be sure—who sent them?"

"Wouldn't tell for a kingdom! Promised him, on the honor of a Torwood, I wouldn't."

That little tell-tale pronoun! Edith's eyes turned resolutely away from the flowers, and her brows contracted a little as she rose up. Madge had flashed out as she had floated in, and Edith went slowly down-stairs, through the hall, and out on the piazza. As she stood there, the person of whom she was thinking, Dr. Stuart himself, came up, and made her in passing a courtly bow.

"Are you better this afternoon, Miss Edith? you hardly look as well as yesterday, I think."

There was something so genial and kindly in his voice, such real solicitude in his face, so much that was good in his frank blue eyes, that Edith could not repel him. The mocking smile and derisive

glance were no longer there, were never there when he spoke to her, and Edith was remembering all he had done for her, so delicately and unobtrusively of late."

"I do not feel any better," she said, "and I"—thank you for your flowers, she wanted to say, but she could not somehow, and stopped short.

"I am very sorry," and he looked as though he meant it. "The afternoon is lovely, and a walk on the beach would do you good, I think. Or, if you feel too weak, and would ride or sail with Madge and me——"

"Thank you, I am quite strong enough to walk."

"I saw Father Peterson in Torwoodtown just now, and he bade me tell you he would call to see you to-morrow, and fetch you the book you wanted."

She bent her head only, and Dr. Stuart went in, and Edith's memory was haunted by a hundred little kind things he had done for her comfort of late, making up in number what they wanted in weight, all in such a retiring, secret way, too.

"I don't want to like that man," she said, speaking unconsciously alone; "and yet——"

"And yet one can't help it," said a voice behind her; "my case exactly."

It was Madge, of course. Edith only smiled, and turned to go down the piazza steps.

"What are you going to do?" Madge asked.

The faint smile was still on Edith's lips.

"To obey Dr. Stuart, my dear. He has prescribed a walk on the beach, and I am going to take it."

"Shall I go with you?"

"You had better not. I walk so very slowly I would tire you to death."

"All right," said Madge, throwing up her hat and catching it dextrously; "I despise slow walking beyond everything, and, besides, I find my constitution requires a sail; so good-by to you."



CHAPTER XIX.

AS THE SHADOWS FELL.

VERY slow indeed was the pace at which Edith walked through the tangled shrubbery toward the shore; but slow as it was, she was completely exhausted by the time it was reached. Under the cool shadow of a large willow a rustic chair of boughs had been erected for her accommodation, by Dr. Stuart, and she sank down within its green arms, her heart palpitating in great surges against her side. She was lying back, with panting lips and closed eyes when a step behind her made her look round; Dr. Stuart again, this time with two bunches of luscious green and purple grapes, wrapped in vine leaves, and which the next instant were lying in her lap.

"Lucy has been telling me of the feverish thirst that has tormented you all day, and in my medical sovereignty I prescribe grapes. Excuse me for intruding."

He was turning away again, but she called him back. Feverishly thirsty, even then she had been wishing for something to allay it, and his gift was most welcome indeed. With an impulsive frankness that came to her sometimes, she held out her hand for the first time in friendliness to him.

"Dr. Stuart," she said, something like color flush-

ing for a second into her colorless face, "you are very kind, and it is time for me to thank you at least."

"I require no thanks," he said hastily, just touching the poor wan hand, and dropping it again. "If my humble offerings have given you a moment's pleasure I am more than repaid."

Edith looked at him wistfully, but his eyes were averted, and his face strangely grave.

"Perhaps I have wronged you," she said; "I don't know. If I have thought more hardly of you than I should, I beg your pardon."

"Edith—Miss Torwood—"

"Oh, say Edith—I like it best from my friends."

She smiled a little at herself to think she was saying such a thing to this abhorred young doctor; but no answering smile moved the dark gravity of his earnest face.

"You have not thought more hardly of me than I deserved—than I seem to deserve, at least. How could you do otherwise than despise one who could seemingly agree to rob four orphan girls of their birthright?"

Her face clouded and she sat silent. Why did he remind her of that when she was trying to think well of him, trying to see him at his best?

"Perhaps I am not really so bad, so despicable as I have appeared; but that involves a long explanation, and you may not be equal to it now—are you?"

"No," she said, wearily, "I am feeble this evening. To-morrow, some other time, I will listen to what you have to say."

"I have many things to say, and when you have heard and answered I shall leave Torwood Towers, perhaps for a time, perhaps —— " a pause and a little tremor of the steady voice, "forever."

"Forever!" Edith echoed faintly.

"Yes; it all depends on you! And now, good-evening. Eat your grapes, and do not stay out after the dew begins to fall."

Breaking into a grave smile for the first time at her wondering look, Dr. Stuart walked away. Edith did look after him wonderingly for a moment or two, but she was too weak and listless, even to wonder long; so she began obeying his orders like a little child, eating her grapes and watching dreamily the boats sailing by over the sunny waves.

A ship far out lay at anchor, and the sailors were singing in chorus; the waves plashing at her feet kept time to their music, and the July breeze murmured mystically among the leaves and branches of the golden willow over her head. In the dreamy warmth and lazy sunshine in the monotonous music of birds and waves and wind, Edith's eyes grew heavy, her pale fingers ceased to lift the grapes to her dry lips, and in her rustic arm-chair, listening to it all, she fell asleep.

And sleeping she dreamed. No distinct and tangible dream, but something vague, shadow, terrible, from which people wake and spring up, full of undefined horror of—they know not what. Edith was conscious in her distempered vision of some huge and shapeless monster, with eyes and tongue of devouring flame and jaws extended, ready to spring upon and devour her; while afar off, looking on,

stood her treacherous sister and false lover, mocking her with their deriding eyes.

With a start she awoke, and sat up in a violent tremor and faintness, awoke to find the evening shadows dark around her, and the chill evening wind coming raw from the sea; awoke to find it not all a dream, for a shape stood beside her, looming up gigantic in the dim light—a shape that clasped her suddenly in its shrouded arms, and muffled her head in a great shawl.

Then for an instant of time all Edith's strength came back—frantically she struggled—with one desperate wrench she tore off the shawl, and one long, wild, shrill shriek awoke the lonely echoes of shore and wood.

There was a fierce imprecation, a rough hand grasped her throat, a horrible sense of strangulation came over Edith, stars came dancing in a blood-red mist before her eyes, a roaring sound as of many waters filled her ears, and thus, with one long convulsive quiver life was gone, and her assailant bore away a stark and rigid burden.

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE HOSPITAL.

A raw, bleak, spring day—mud and snow, and slush ankle deep in the streets, a sudden sky of lead frowning and lowering wrathfully over the good city of Washington; long, lamentable blasts tearing the hats off pedestrians, making grabs at the children on their way from afternoon school, clutching desperately at all sorts of stray waifs, and roaring off with them to sea, like Bottom the weaver, “so that it would do any man’s heart good to hear it.” A chill and boisterous day, that had far more of winter gone than summer coming in its stepmother breath; a day for blue noses, great-coats, and blazing fires; a day on which nobody was out who could possibly stay in, and people comfortably housed looked out through windows at luckless wayfarers tramping with heads bowed, and hats frantically clutched in both hands, with a luxurious sense of enjoyment.

Three men were walking together down Pennsylvania avenue, struggling manfully against the rough blasts, who had “met by chance the usual way” not ten minutes before. One common bond of sympathy made them glad to meet; they were all from Torwoodtown—Father Peterson, the Rev. Alexander McPherson, and young Mr. Moreen, who used to

come long ago to that uprising little town to kill time fishing and gunning, and who at the first clash of war, had gone where glory led him, and so on—that is to say, had taken to soldiering, to kill that invincible enemy of his, Time. Young Mr. Moreen was young Lieutenant Moreen now; but of what value were all his bright buttons and gay shoulder knots since Madge Torwood's black eyes were not near to look on and approve. *Entre nous*, Madge Torwood said "No." one day to a very tender proposal from young Mr. Moreen, and most cruelly stuck to it; so Mr. Moreen went to the war desolated, feeling that he would rather be shot than otherwise, since the only blessing life had for him, besides pale ale and cigars, was denied him. The Southern bullets, flew by him harmlessly, however, while they laid low many a better man; and Lieutenant Moreen, sound and unmaimed, is walking along the windy streets, busy in conversation, and frantic attempts to keep his military cap on. Said cap being set excessively on one side of his head, and the gale being of the highest, is rather difficult to be kept from flying into the regions of space and at length an uncommonly obstreperous gust, howling palyfully along, makes a grab at it, and whirls it triumphantly down the street.

"Oh, hang it!" exclaims Lieutenant Moreen, in a passion, only prevented from using still more forcible language by the presence of the clergy. "I knew the confounded thing would go at last."

"So did I," observed Mr. McPherson with gravity, eyeing the gambols of the frisky headpiece; "if young soldiers will wear their caps on three hairs

when the wind is fit to blow the horns off the cows, what else can they expect? Go after it."

There being no alternative, the lieutenant, with a very ill grace, went, and returned very cross and red in the face.

"Never mind, lieutenant," said Father Peterson, laughing good-naturedly, "as even priests will do a other people's misfortune, "there are worse disasters at sea. Go on with what you were saying."

"About Stuart?" said the young man brightening up at once with all a soldier's enthusiasm. "Well, sir, as I told you, he fought like a lion through the whole engagement, saved General K——'s life, very nearly losing his own in the act, and was a sort of modern *Cour de Lion* throughout the whole affair. He got his reward, though, which is more than we all do, for they made him a colonel for it."

"I saw all about it in the papers. You serve under him, eh?"

"Yes, sir!" said the lieutenant emphatically, "I'd be sorry to serve under any one else. The whole regiment adore him."

"He always was a fine fellow," said the priest. "I liked him in Torwoodtown, but I never thought he possessed the stuff heroes are made of."

"Nor the stuff philanthropists are made of," chimed in Mr. McPherson. "You have said he has founded a private hospital at his own expense here in the city, with the very best nurses and medical attendants."

"Being one of his own staff," said the lieutenant, "for when he is done fighting he takes to doctoring,

by way of being always busy. Well, good-day to your reverence—I turn off here."

Lifting his cap in a military salute, the soldier went round a corner, and the two clergymen walked on together.

"I used to pride myself a little," began Mr. McPherson, after a short silence, "on being somewhat of a judge of human nature, but I confess this man baffled me. I never could quite make him out at Torwoodtown."

"How was that?"

"About that will, you know. You heard of it, of course?"

"Of Judge Torwood's? Surely. What had that to do with it?"

"Everything! What would you have thought of him had he complied with it?"

"And robbed the orphan sisters. Well, I must say I could hardly have thought him an archangel."

"That is where he puzzled me," said Mr. McPherson. "I never could clearly make out that he intended to refuse the bequest, and yet I could never persuade myself that he meant to accept. Dr. Stuart was an eccentric fellow in those days."

"Is he not now?"

"He is a changed man, sir—a grave earnest man, living with a purpose—a benefactor, as I said, to his race."

"What has wrought this change?"

"The loss of Edith Torwood."

Both were silent then.

"He never really intended profiting by this most unfair will?" the priest said.

"Certainly not. The legacy which made him a rich man, and of which his mother and all the world were ignorant, had fallen to him about a month before, and he was as wealthy as any Christian has a right to be. But as I said, he was eccentric, and it pleased him to come to Torwood Towers, and see the play played out."

"Ah! the play that began like a comedy ended tragically enough. So he really meant to marry Edith Torwood?"

"If she would have had him, and I think myself she would when she knew him, and he intended to drop his mask, and show himself to her as he really was. He was the last one that ever saw her on that fatal night."

And no clew has been found all this time?"

"Not the slightest that I have heard of."

"There can be no doubt, I suppose, that she was murdered?"

"None at all! There was the blood, the indications of the struggle, every thing to confirm it, and the sea was at hand to make a winding sheet that would tell no tale."

"And so the whole affair is to be involved in mystery until that same sea shall give up its dead! Do you know I liked that Creole girl; with all her pride and fire, she was as humble in some ways as little child. She used to play at the church every Sunday, and the music her fingers could evoke out of our poor old melodion was something wonderful."

"I have heard her. Ah! it was a great pity! There was something grand in the girl's nature that made one admire her in spite of one's self. I don't wonder

Stuart has been a changed man since he lost her, though there was a time when I fancied Lucy would have been his choice."

"And there was a time," smiled Father Peterson, "when I thought Lucy would have been Mrs. McPherson before this."

Mr. McPherson produced his snuff-box.

"Have a pinch? Well, now, I don't know about that! On the whole, I think I'll—see about it! Are you going?"

"Yes; this is my destination. You are for the hospital, you said?"

"I think so. I want to have a look at the new nurses, Sisters of Charity; and capital nurses they make. The colonel told me he was importing a batch of them, and they were to be there yesterday."

Smiling at the notion of a batch of nuns, the Rev. Mr. Peterson entered a house near, and Mr. McPherson went on his way alone. That way led him into a quiet, remote street, where the city noises came muffled and faint, and toward a large stone building in an inclosed court-yard, looking drear and ghastly in the gray light of this windy spring day. At the outer gate two men stood, one tall and distinguished looking, in a long cloak and military cap, the other an orderly standing on guard.

The tall man in the cloak turned at the approach of the minister, disclosing the face of Dr. Paul Stuart, but not the face he used to wear. No, it was strangely altered—brown, grave, earnest, the old mocking light gone out of the thoughtful yet kindly blue eyes, the old doubtful smile vanished from the compressed and mustached mouth. Yes, he was a changed

man; his very voice was not the same—was very different from the light, careless tone of other days.

"I have been expecting you," he said, holding out his hand. "Come in. Brown, you will attend to what I have been saying."

The orderly touched his cap.

"Yes, colonel."

The two men, the colonel and the clergyman, turned into the paved yard, side by side.

"I suppose this hospital of yours is filled, after your recent battle," the latter said.

"Pretty well—yes. And who do you suppose makes one of its inmates?"

"How can I tell? Who?"

"Captain Angus Torwood."

"You don't say so! Wounded?"

"Yes; but not badly. We are sworn brothers-in-arms now—sort of modern David and Jonathan," smiling slightly; "and the good sisters will have him as right as a trivet in no time."

"The sisters are here, then?"

"Came last night. Would you like to see Torwood? He did some splendid fighting in this last engagement of ours."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mr. McPherson. "I did not particularly admire him in Torwoodtown; but, as other folks have changed, perhaps he has, too."

"Meaning me," smiled Colonel Stuart, as they entered the first ward, where, in long rows of beds, the sick soldiers lay.

Passing down the long aisles between the rows, the young colonel paused there to speak to the poor

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fellows, whose eyes brightened, and whose pale faces lit gladly at the sight of their commander. Here and there the black-robed sisters were flitting about, noiseless ministering angels, shod with the shoes of silence, and with touch and voice tenderly modulated to suit suffering ears.

Reaching one bed near the end of the row, the colonel came to a halt. A man, whose swarthy face, whitened by loss of blood, and looking still more white contrasted with his jetty hair and mustache, reclined, propped up by pillows, with one of the sisters standing beside him preparing some cooling draught.

"Good-morning, sister," said the colonel. "How is our patient to-day?"

The sister looked up, smiling.

"A most impatient patient, colonel; he is chafing himself into a fever at his confinement. Here, sir, drink this, and deny it if you can."

Angus Torwood drained the offered potion, half smiling, too.

"Good-day to you, colonel. I fear I must plead guilty to my kind nurse's charge. Why——"

He stopped short, looking wonderingly at the clergyman, while the nun moved away.

"I bring an old friend to see you, Torwood. You remember him, I know."

Captain Angus Torwood held out his hand.

"My memory is a good one. I hope Mr. McPherson finds himself well?"

"Never better. Sorry to see you here, my young friend, but it is the fortune of war. What is it?"

"A saber-thrust, that has lost me more blood than I can conveniently spare, but nothing of any consequence—Hallo! What's gone wrong with the colonel? By Jove! he's going to faint!"

He might well start and exclaim. Colonel Stuart, standing quietly by the bedside, had suddenly turned as white as death, and grasped a chair for support. He uttered no cry nor exclamation: he had only recoiled back, as if at some awful sight, turning white even to his lips. What was it at? There was nothing to be seen but the wounded soldiers lying around, no one passing by but the nursing sisters.

Mr. McPherson started, and took out his snuff-box, to relieve himself by a pinch.

"Shall I fetch you a glass of water, colonel? You do look uncommonly bad, I allow. Anything wrong?"

Colonel Stuart, still startingly pale, sank into a chair.

"Nothing that water can help. I have had a blow, that is all. Don't mind me; it will be over presently."

There was a table near. Colonel Stuart leaned his elbow on it, his forehead on his hand, and remained immovable. Mr. McPherson, very much mystified, went off to the next row of beds, and Angus Torwood sat and stared in greatest wonder. It was long before Colonel Stuart looked up, and when he did his face was like marble.

"Captain Torwood," he said, "are you strong enough to bear a shock?"

"A shock!" Angus repeated, staring harder than ever.

"Yes; something very strange; something more wonderful than anything in fairy tales has just happened."

Captain Torwood's only reply to this was an increase of staring, if such a thing was possible, while an idea shot through his mind that his colonel was suddenly going mad.

"I want to tell you, if you are strong enough to bear it; but I fear the shock it will occasion may injure you."

"Injure me! Shock! Colonel, I don't know in the least what you are driving at."

"I will tell you then; but promise me not to cry out or exclaim."

"I promise. What the deuce is it?"

Colonel Stuart bent down and whispered one short phrase—four little words, but their effect was magical. Angus Torwood, forgetting his promise and his weakness, started up in bed with a cry that rang through the hospital ward.

"Hush!" exclaimed Colonel Stuart, grasping his arm. "I warned you. Not one word, not one sign to betray what I have told you. Lie down and listen to me."

With eyes that seemed starting from their sockets, Angus Torwood complied, and Colonel Stuart, bending over him, spoke earnestly and rapidly. Mr. McPherson, coming up three minutes later, caught his last words.

"If you comply, I am certain of success. Do you think you are sufficiently master of yourself to do as I have told you?"

"I will try," said Angus, in a bewildered sort of



way; "but I hardly know whether I am walking or dreaming."

"Neither do I," interrupted Mr. McPherson. "Which of you two gentlemen yelled just now?"

Colonel Stuart arose smiling, but with a glance of warning at Angus.

"Captain Torwood had an unexpected twinge, and cried out like a young lady. What do you think of my hospital?"

"Everything that is good. Have you quite recovered yourself?"

"Quite, thank you. Are you ready to go?"

"I am altogether at your service."

"Then, good-by, Captain Torwood, and good luck to you. You will be as well as ever, if not better, before I get back."

They shook hands, the colonel in a manner full of deep but suppressed excitement; the captain in a way hopelessly dazed and bewildered.

Mr. McPherson looked from one to the other with a keen, suspicious glance, but followed the colonel out without saying anything. Once in the keen outer air, the young officer took off his cap, and let the cold wind lift his fair hair, with a long, long breath. In doing so he caught the minister's eyes, and read his suspicions therein.

"Yes," said Mr. McPherson, taking snuff; "something has happened this morning; but you needn't tell me if you don't want to. It makes no difference."

Colonel Stuart laughed, and held out his hand.

"Say good-by, Mr. McPherson. I don't know as I shall see you again for a while. I am going away."

"Good-by," said Mr. McPherson, stoically.

"Don't you want to know where I am going?"

"Not particularly."

"Would you like to know my business?"

"Why should I? It is nothing to me."

"Yes, it is. Listen. I am going to find out about Edith Torwood's murder!"

The minister started back aghast.

"What!"

"Ah! I thought you would like to know. Here, Brown, bring up my horse."

The orderly led forward the colonel's charger, and that officer vaulted lightly into the saddle.

"Farewell, Mr. McPherson," he called, dashing off; "go and talk to Captain Torwood, and he will tell you a secret. Meantime, I'm off for New York; the trail begins there."

CHAPTER XXI.

ON THE TRACK.

In a certain palace-like hotel on that street of palaces, the Fifth Avenue, New York City, there resided a lady, young, rich, and so beautiful that her fame had spread far and wide, from Dan even unto Beersheba. Artists, poets, authors, and vagabonds of that sort, went wild about her. There was not a paper or magazine you came across that you did not find "Lines to Florence." "Sonnet to Floy," "To F. St. L." "To a Beautiful Blonde," and so on to the end of the chapter. As to painters, she sat for Venuses, Madonnas, Peris, Hebes, and nearly every other good-looking goddess that ever was heard of, and carvers of marble had busts of her stuck all round their studies, and full length figures, in every attitude that artist's brain ever conceived. For their pains, Mrs. St. Leon, the name of this bewildering beauty, smiled on them sweetly out of her blue eyes, and smiled on all alike, let them praise her, go mad about her if they chose, and cared not a groat for one of them. All the women envied her; her dresses, her jewels, her box at the opera, her carriage, her retinue of attendants, her splendid suite of rooms, her reunions, matinees, and receptions, were all alike the theme of their envy

and slander. But Mrs. St. Leon was the fashion, and though the dear creatures flayed her alive, and tore her character to tatters behind backs, they were only too glad of a card to these same receptions of hers, and nearly smothered her with kisses every time they met.

Of Mr. St. Leon, not much was known—he certainly had never been seen in New York with his charming wife, who had come among them as suddenly as if she had dropped from the skies, and, by the title deed of beauty and wealth, took her place among them at once. There was a vague rumor of a Confederate of her name, who was high in rank in the Southern Army, but whether he was the proprietor of this Fifth Avenue belle, or not, Fifth Avenue could not positively say. Mrs. St. Leon herself declined speaking on the subject, and only smiled in sublime suavity, and opened her soft velvety eyes a little wider when these rumors came floating to her ears.

“Mrs. Grunde says I am a deserted wife, and Miss McFlimsey says I am no better than I ought to be, does she?” Mrs. St. Leon lisped softly to her maid, who had just made the report. “Dear me! tell my secretary to send them cards for my fancy-dress party, *Hermine*; if they really think as they say, they won’t come, of course.”

But Mrs. Grunde and Miss McFlimsey and everybody else were only too glad to come, and on the night appointed for the fancy-dress party Mrs. St. Leon’s rooms were filled with the *élite* of the city. The glaring gas shone on all brilliance, gorgeousness, and splendor wealth could purchase, on women

arrayed like queens, and on men arrayed in all the purple and fine linen men dare wear.

Like an empress this lovely hostess received them, magnificently dressed, with diamonds running like rivers of light around her white throat, diamonds blazing on her rounded arms, on her taper fingers, dangling from her ears, and clasping back from the primrose face the redundancy of golden curls shimmering to her waist. She was dressed to personate a water nymph, and her robe was as thin, and filmy, and floating, and mist-like, as if it were really sea spray.

Every one wore some kind of fancy dress; and queens and flowers-girls, and angels and nuns, and knights and brigands, and sailors and Turks, twined and swayed this way and that, while the air was heavy with music and perfume.

In a little shady alcove, hung with rose curtains, there was a sofa whereon sat a lady and gentleman, discussing the moving panorama before them. The gentleman in the costume of a Highland chief was the most deeply smitten of the batch of poets who wrote the sonnets and things about the fair hostess, and the lady was Mrs. Grundo, who hated Mrs. St. Leon through sheer envy, more than she did any one else in the world.

"The little St. Leon is out in full feather this evening," she was saying, looking through her glass. "Why will she persist in wearing white when she is so unhappily inclined to *embonpoint*?"

"She is lovelier than ever," said the poet, following the snowy figure with enraptured eyes; "one would think she had sat for Owen Meredith's poem;

"The folds of her wine-dark violet dress
Glow over the sofa, fall on fall,
As she sits in the air of loveliness,
With a smile for each and for all

"Half of her exquisite face in the shade
Which o'er it the screen in her soft hand flings;
Through the gloom glows her hair in its odorous wave—
In the firelight are sparkling her rings.

"She sits in the curtained, luxurious light
Of that room, with its porcelain and pictures and flowers,
When the dark days half done, and the snow-flakes white
Passed the window in feathery showers.

"As she glides up the sunlight, you'd say she was made
To loll back in a carriage all day with a smile,
And at dark, on a sofa, to lean in the shade
Of soft lamps, and be wooed for awhile.

"'Tis so fair! would my bite, if I bit it, draw blood?
Will it cry if I hurt it, or scold if I kiss?
Is it made with its beauty of wax or of wood?
Is it worth while to guess at all this?"

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Grunde, as the poet paused;
"it is made of wax and insipidity—nothing else.
Do you know," leaning forward, confidentially, "I
have found out something about her."

"No!" cried the poet, vividly interested.
"What?"

"Who she is? Her maiden name is Torwood—
Miss Florence Torwood, third daughter of a certain
Maryland judge, now dead; and she eloped nearly
a year ago with this St. Leon she is married to. He
is a Cuban, I believe, and there can be no doubt he
is that Captain St. Leon who behaved so traitor-
ously."

"How did you find all this out?"

"From my niece, who was a schoolmate of hers at Mademoiselle De Juponville's seminary, here in New York. Madame Torwood, her stepmother, took her from school and brought her to Torwood Tower, the name of their place down in Maryland, and two or three weeks after she eloped with this St. Leon, who, by the way, Beatrice says, was engaged to an elder sister of hers at the time."

"St. Leon's a lucky fellow to have the prettiest wife in America, I can understand his deserting his country, but I confess I cannot understand his desertion of la belle Florence."

"Oh, it's only a temporary desertion, and besides, after eight months of matrimony he may not be so badly in love with her as you are. I confess he has more faith in her than I would have; for a woman who elopes once will——"

"Elope again—very true," said a deep voice at the lady's elbow; and looking round she saw a tall man in the dress of a hermit, with his long white hair and beard, to which his straight, stalwart proportions and piercing bright eyes gave the lie direct.

Mrs. Grunde looked at him keenly, but failed to recognize an acquaintance in the disguise.

"I am not aware, sir," she said, superciliously, "that I was addressing my remarks to you!"

"Very true, and I beg a thousand pardons for the interruption; but the truth and good sense of your remarks lay so palpably on the surface that I could not help coinciding. May I ask if Mrs. St. Leon has left the room?"

"She has, sir," said the poet, failing as well as his fair friend to recognize the speaker. "She passed into yonder conservatory not two minutes ago."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone."

"Thank you."

The hermit strode past, made his way through the crowd, while many an eye followed his imposing figure curiously, and disappeared within the conservatory.

Mrs. Grunde looked at the poet curiously.

"Who on earth is that?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. His disguise is perfect."

"What can he want with Mrs. St. Leon? What," cried Mrs. Grunde, excitedly, "what if it should be her husband?"

"My dear madam, what an idea!"

"He looks like a soldier, in spite of his disguise. I am certain he is no one I know, and I am equally certain I am acquainted with every one Mrs. St. Leon has invited. I tell you I believe it is her husband."

"He must be a bold fellow if it is; but I fancy you are mistaken. Oh, excuse me; there is your niece, Miss Beatrice, going to sing; and I must join her."

The poet went over to the piano, where a tall, stylish girl had just taken her seat, and Mrs. Grunde, possessed of the new idea which had seized her, made her way toward the conservatory. The air there was almost overpowering from the odor of rich exotics, and the place was dimly lighted by tiny colored lamps, sparkling like stars or fire-flies among the

plants. So faint was the light that at first she could not be certain whether the rooms were empty or not; but at last, in a distant recess, amid a wilderness of flowers, her eye caught the shimmer of a filmy white skirt.

Very softly she approached. Of course so great a lady could not be guilty of the small vice of eaves-dropping; but her duty to her country required her to listen, if it should really be St. Leon. Keeping in the shadow of some tall orange trees, she drew nearer, and, hidden herself, had a full view of the tableau before her.

What was it she saw? The stately hermit in the act of removing his false hair and beard, of throwing off his long serge cloak, and standing revealed in the lamplight, a young and distinguished-looking man, in the uniform of a colonel of the Federal Army. And little Mrs. St. Leon, the rich, the beautiful, the courted, the irresistible, was cowering on a sofa, her face buried in the cushions, all her lovely golden ringlets falling in the wildest disorder about her, in a position of crouching, abject terror, crying in a bitter voice of supplication:

"Oh, I never meant it! I never meant it! I never meant it! Oh, Dr. Stuart, how cruel you are!"

"Confess!" said the man's deep voice, in a tone pitiless as doom, "or neither your youth, your beauty, nor your wealth shall save you. 'Justice, though the heavens fall' shall be my stern motto to the end. I know a great deal, and what I do not know I shall never rest until I find out—your share in it as well as the rest! Speak!"

Cowering lower and lower among the pillows, the

frightened little beauty did speak, but it was only to cry, amid broken sobs :

"Oh, what have I done! what have I done! what have I done!"

"What you never can repair, though you lived a thousand years, and spent every one of them in the effort; but all the atonement in your power shall be wrung from you, whether you will or not. Your beauty has no power over me, for I know you, madam, and I tell you here, Mrs. St. Leon, the law shall force you to speak."

But still she only spoke to sob and wail :

"Oh, what shall I do! what shall I do! Oh, Dr. Stuart, have you no pity!"

"None for you. What pity had you for your murdered sister in the days gone by. The same measure you measured out shall be returned to you! Rise madam; it is growing late, and I am in no mood for lingering here! Will you confess, or shall I startle this gay assembly of your aristocratic friends by bringing a couple of policemen into their midst? For the last time, Florence St. Leon, will you speak?"

And Florence St. Leon, the fascinating, about whom half the young aristocrats of New York were going wild, whom poets sang, and artists painted, dropped down on her knees at the stern soldier's feet, her golden hair falling off a face ghastly with mental terror, and held up her jeweled hands in frantic appeal.

"I will speak! I will speak! Oh, Dr. Stuart be merciful, and I will confess all!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HUNTED DOWN.

MRS. ST. LEON'S grand reunion was over. In the cold gray light of a chill spring morning, carriage after carriage had rolled away from her stately portals, freighted with loads of sleepy loveliness, soiled kids, and crumbled satins. When the round red morning sun was rising over the city, and all the common folks of this world who are vulgar enough to work for a living were rising with it, Madame St. Leon's guests were going to bed, jaded and worn out, after the night's dancing and champagne.

All but one. In an upper chamber of a fashionable hotel, fronting on Broadway, a gentleman was pacing up and down, his eyes fixed on the carpet, his face indicative of deep thought. An odd-looking robe of coarse gray serge lay on the back of a chair, and something like a smile broke over the dark gravity of his face whenever he chanced to glance that way. Pens, ink, and paper lay scattered about on an inlaid table near, and sitting down after a while he began to write a letter.

NEW YORK, March 29.

"MY DEAR ANGUS:—I promised to write to you, didn't I?—and though I hate letter-writing, I suppose I am in for it, and must fulfil my promise.

There never was such luck as mine ; everything is turning out beautifully, and I am beginning to think Fouché himself was a poor detective compared with me."

"Now for particulars ; I reached here yesterday afternoon, made certain inquiries, found out Mrs. St. Leon was to give a tea splash of unrivaled magnificence—I mean a fancy-dress party—in the evening, and determined to go. Nothing like striking while the iron is hot, you know ; but the difficulty was to get admitted, for Madame St. Leon is decidedly select and exclusive on these occasions. However, in the vocabulary of great men, you are aware there is no such word as fail.

"I came, I maneuvered, I succeeded. I went ! It was the luckiest thing in the world it chanced to be a fancy-dress party, for my own mother would not have known me in my disguise. My good genius stood by me all through the evening. Mrs. St. Leon sought a moment's solitude and repose in the quiet of a deserted conservatory—I followed her. The plants in vases, three feet high, formed a sort of primeval forest on a small scale, the lights were dim, the dance music subdued by distance, and with scenery, and footlights, and with everything charmingly suitable, I stood before her with tragic suddenness, threw off my disguise, struck an attitude, and stared ! She stared, too, poor little golden-haired sinner ; much as Macbeth does at the ghost of Banquo, in speechless horror. Her first impulse, woman-like, was to scream.

"I checked that—our play wanted no spectators. We both found our tongues after we got tired making eyes at each other, and a tolerable good use I made of mine.

"If ever pretty Mistress Florence was scared out of a year's growth, old boy, it was last night. Nero, Herod, Henry the Eighth, were angels of kindness and clemency compared with me—tears, sobs,

prayers, hysterics, wringing of hands, all the powerful train of female artillery, was like blank shot—my heart was iron-clad—I was merciless! It was the only way to fetch everything out, and everything did come out at last; but I tell you, Torwood, it gave me a very odd feeling to see that girl kneeling at my feet, crying for mercy like a child, and still be relentless! I don't know which of us was the more rejoiced when the interview ended, and the play was played out. I dismissed her in peace at last, saw the tears wiped away from the blue eyes, the poor golden ringlets rearranged, and came here, feeling as I hope I shall never have occasion to feel again in my life.

"My next move shall be for Torwoodtown. I start in half an hour, and don't I anticipate a scene unmasking the little traitress there. Everything was as I anticipated—Florence was but the cat's-paw—justice has not overtaken the monkey yet, but soon will now, and 'justice, though the heavens fall,' has been my merciless motto in this search.

"As for you, I have only to repeat my last warning—be careful! betray nothing until the time comes. I know you will find the task a hard one, my dear fellow, but there is no help for it. How I should like to have seen McPherson when you told him all! Didn't he empty his snuff-box?

"Half-past six, and the cars start in a quarter of an hour! I'm off!

"Ever yours,

"PAUL STUART."

Military men understand dispatch. Half an hour after writing the last word the letter addressed to Captain Angus Torwood, Washington, was on its way to its destination, and the writer, seated in the cars, was on the way to his, as fast as steam could bear him. Looking thoughtfully out of the window

at the ever-changing panorama of nature, Colonel Stuart mused over the great change in his life that had taken place since that other day, nearly a year ago, when at his mother's summons, he had left New York for the very place he was going to now, amused at Mr. Torwood's eccentric will, and curious to see the four sisters. How all things had changed since then! He had lived a romance himself in that old house, as startling as any he had ever read, and now he was returning to finish the last chapter of "Retribution." He was no expected visitor; no one at Torwood Towers ever looked to see him again—for his purpose so much the better. There had been a stormy scene one morning between its mistress and himself, in which he was very quiet, but hard as iron, obdurate as death; and in which she had wept and pleaded, and humbled herself as no one would have believed Madame Torwood could have done. Then, for the first time, she had learned which of her stepdaughters her darling Paul had chosen, and mother and son had parted, never expecting to meet again at Torwood Towers.

"How they will open their eyes!" the young colonel mused, smiling to himself. "My poor mother, she will be glad to see me too, for I really believe she thinks me as near perfection as it is possible for any one to be, and live. I was a little too hard, I fear, in that last interview—but that was a long time ago, and I know she is as ready to forget and forgive as myself. As for that other—but sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof!"

In the dusky haze of a June twilight, Dr. Stuart had first come to Torwoodtown—in the dusky haze

of a cold, spring day, he landed in Torwoodtown again. Very quiet the little town looked, with its few dim street-lamps winking feebly in the gloom, the raw sea-wind blowing in your face, and the black waves cannonading dully on the shore. A leaden sky hung over all, and the sloppy unpaved street was ankle deep in spring mire. All dreary enough, but the heart makes its own sunshine, and Colonel Stuart whistled a tune as he splashed through it, and strode up to the Torwoodtown Hotel. Mr. Jinks, the hostler, lounging on the piazza with a select few of his friends, smoking clay pipes, opened his eyes at the gentleman's approach.

"I'm blest if here ain't the young doctor as was here last summer, back again! I heard he 'listed and got made a major-gineral, or suthin' about the size o' that. What's he back after, I should like to know?"

Colonel Stuart being on foot, and Mr. Jinks' service not being required, he did not seem likely to know; but he and the loungers saw him stroll into the office, take up a paper, and order supper. "And," said Colonel Stuart, lying back in an easy position to read, "I shall want a fast horse immediately after. You need not prepare a room for me. I shall not sleep here to-night."

It was quite dark before the colonel got through with his supper, and throwing a large riding-cloak over his shoulders, he mounted the horse Mr. Jinks was holding in readiness. Pitch-dark, and a wintry night, without moon or stars, and a miserable drizzle, that was half-snow and half-rain, piercing sharp through everything.

"A heavenly gallop I am likely to have of it," he muttered, gathering up the reins. "Lucky for me I know the confounded road so well. There, my good fellow, give him his head—that will do, thank you."

Horse and rider sped away through the darkness like specters, on over the black, forsaken road, with the black and lonesome sea booming like distant thunder, the black and ghastly woods around him, and the black and wrathful night sky lowering over all. A lonely night ride, in which any chance passer-by might have taken him for the Black Horseman of the Hartz Mountains—a dismal ride, cold and comfortless, his horse stumbling over rocks and slipping in the greasy mire; but the young officer thought neither of rain, nor cold, nor loneliness. The purpose that brought him filled his mind, to the exclusion of all things else.

Looming up, a black and goblin shape in the gloom, Torwood Towers rose before him at last. Walking his horse into the courtyard, he dismounted, and led him toward the stable himself. No one was visible—no sound of life came from the lonely old house. The three lights that always burned, illuminated it—one in the entrance hall, one from the great kitchen, and the third from the drawing-room window. He smiled a grave smile as he watched this last.

"What are they doing, I wonder?" he thought, "my lady, Miss Lucy, and wild Madge. How little they think their loving son and step-brother is here to pay his respects. Sleep in peace to-night, Lucy Torwood; to-morrow night you may not find it so easy, for the hour of retribution has come!"

He did not enter the house. Having seen his horse all right, he started off with his long strides through the dark and dismal shrubbery, striking into the lonely meadow that brought him to the cedar woods. Along that forsaken path, in the black heart of the woods, another figure had fitted one July night to the solitary hut of the fortune-teller. To that very hut Colonel Stuart was walking now, and its red beacon light flamed out across his pathway, at last. Like the other visitor, he paused at the broken window to reconnoiter; like her he saw the wretched interior, illuminated by a roaring wood fire, the overgrown cat blinking in one chimney corner, and the dark sibyl on a low stool in the other, her hands clasping her knees, her shining black eyes brooding on the fire. An authoritative knock at the door brought her from her musings.

"Who is there?" she demanded, approaching.

"A friend."

"What do you want?"

"A little fortune-telling. Open the door, will you?"

Huldah, used to nocturnal callers, threw back the door, and a tall man, in a long cloak, came in, and shook the mud and rain off his boots.

"A delightful night for pedestrians, Huldah, is it not? I shall muddy your floor; but you'll excuse me, won't you?"

He crossed over, took a seat, and stretched out his splashed boots to the drying influence of the blaze. Huldah stood looking at him without a word.

"It's a lucky thing for you, Huldah, wood is so plentiful here, or you would wake up some morning

and find yourself as stiff as Lot's wife; but perhaps you never heard of the lady? Won't you be seated? and don't stare so; it is not polite."

"What brings Dr. Stuart here?" Huldah asked, in her deep tones, approaching the fire as she spoke.

"I told you before, did I not? A little fortune-telling. I have great faith in you, Huldah; and have taken a journey from New York on purpose to see you."

"From New York! I thought——"

"You thought," her visitor struck in, as she came to a full stop, "I was down South in Dixie, fighting for glory, and so on. Oh, no; I've been in New York, and while there called on a pretty little friend of ours. You know her—Mrs. St. Leon. Do sit down; it makes me uncomfortable to see you standing up there like a grenadier on guard."

Huldah's stool was behind her; she drew it up, and sat down, keeping her shining black eyes fixed on her visitor, as if fascinated, her dark, gipsy face looking weird and uncanny enough in the lurid fire-light.

"That's right. Now we can talk comfortably, and I have a great deal to say to you, Huldah. Can you guess what it is about?"

"I don't want to guess."

"No, I should think not. Well, I am going to be very frank, and save you the trouble. I told you, as I said, I wanted a little fortune-telling; but I am going to reverse the way you usually do that sort of thing, and instead of you telling me mine, I intend to tell you yours."

Huldah sat immovable, her spectral black eyes intently fixed on his face. Colonel Stuart leaned towards her, and lowered his voice :

"I can predict your whole future in two words—a halter!"

Huldah never moved a muscle.

"If the halter had its due, my good Huldah, you know I should have no companion in this hut. Do you understand me? Do you know that they hang people for MURDER in these United States? You may as well speak, Huldah; I shall find means to make you presently."

"What is the use of speaking?" exclaimed the mulatto woman impatiently, "when I don't know what you are talking about."

"Bah! I understand all that! Every criminal pleads not guilty when placed in the dock; but murders are committed, and men, and women, sometimes, Huldah, are hung for them. You don't understand me, eh? Neither could I understand at first why you murdered Edith Torwood!"

Huldah sat still like a dark effigy in stone, unmoved.

"I never murdered Edith Torwood," she composedly said.

"Of course that is your answer, but I happen to have proofs. Do you comprehend what I mean when I say I saw Mrs. St. Leon in New York?"

"Yes, I understand plain English."

"I saw Florence St. Leon, then, my good Huldah, and listen. She has told me *all*! All! you understand—ALL!"

The stone face was changeless in its calm.

"I know everything from first to last—the whole dark and shameful story. Not one event that happened from the night Lucy Torwood, your foster child, sought you out, in spite of storm and darkness, until that July evening when the atrocious deed was done, is hidden from me. What do you think of that?"

She neither moved nor spoke. The black eyes still glared upon him; the brown face was of cast-iron.

"Still dumb! Well, I can go further back yet—back to the time before the murdered girl ever came here, when Lucy Torwood, your nursling, sent you to Cuba to see what she was like beforehand. You performed your mission well—you are a clever woman. Huldah, you dogged her night and day; you haunted her like an evil shadow everywhere; you frightened her so that she was glad to leave her island home and come here, simply to escape you. She did not escape; the evening after her arrival you started up before her at the gate of Torwood Towers. I did not know then why she shrieked and nearly fainted at the sight; she had reason to, had she not?"

Only that gorgon-like start for an answer. Colonel Stuart, returning it with compound interest, kept on.

"It was not very wise of you and Miss Lucy to trust Florence with your secrets and motives; but perhaps you could not help it. It was quite a well-laid plan, I must allow, and you played ghost uncommonly well in the shrubbery, too. There was a great tragic actress lost in you, Huldah."

He paused to stroke the cat, blinking at his feet. The cat's mistress took an easier position on her stool, and stared steadfastly on.

"You and your nursing laid your plans cleverly enough that night on which she sought you out here; but there was a Scotch poet once who remarked, with a great deal of good sense and bad English, that 'the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley.' It was all laid out beautifully; you and Lucy understood the haughty nature of Edith, the susceptible one of Florence, and the hoidenish carelessness of Madge, and were sure of success. Miss Lucy knew the will of her father as pat as her prayers, and had made up her mind to be Lady of Torwood Towers. Edith would despise my mother's son, of course, and would be no rival; Florence would be captivated by the handsome face of Mr. St. Leon. Madge was too young and too wild; Lucy was to have it all her own way, be my wife, and heiress of her father's wealth. Wasn't that the way of it, Huldah? Do speak, won't you? It is rather trying to leave all the talking to me."

"You do it so well it would be a pity to interrupt you," Huldah said, finding voice at last. "Did Mrs. St. Leon tell you all this?"

"Never mind who told me; you know it is true! Between you and Miss Torwood you made the match you intended; but you found that, after all, you were likely to be balked. You saw that Edith, not Lucy, was likely, after all, to be the mistress of Torwood, and, stopping at nothing, you—are you listening, Huldah?—you murdered her!"

Huldah never flinched up to her stern eyes.

"No, I did not. Edith Torwood is not murdered, and you know it!"

"Where is she, then?"

"You need not ask; you know better than I do."

"You own the truth of all I have said?"

"I own nothing but this—that if you have come all the way from New York, thinking to frighten me, you have made the greatest mistake of your life. Edith Torwood is not murdered, and you know it well. If you have finished what you have to say you had better go home."

"Very hospitable of you; but I have not quite finished yet. The evening on which Edith Torwood was last seen alive you came behind her as she sat on the beach. Oh, you need not speak—I know it all; you lifted her in your strong arms, stifled her cries in a shawl, and bore her off. Since that time nothing has been heard of her, and I have come to you to-night to demand a full account of what followed."

"Demand away! I shall tell you nothing," the mulatto woman said, with grim sullenness.

"You may as well—I shall surely learn it before another sun sets."

"How?"

"From Lucy Torwood! You may be made of granite, but she is not. I go there now, and I shall be as merciless with her as she was with her sister. The pity you both showed Edith Torwood shall be shown to you, so look to yourselves."

He rose as he spoke, drew his cloak closely around him, drew his hat down over his brows, and prepared

to face the raw and rainy night, Huldah sitting all the while like a grim figure of stone.

"Once again," he said, pausing at the door, "will you speak?"

"I have nothing to say."

"Lucy Torwood will have, then! Good-night to you and pleasant dreams!"

He was gone, lost to view in the blackness, the moment the door closed. Through the forest path, through the meadows, through the shrubbery, back again at Torwood Towers in an incredibly short space of time. The window of his room opened on the piazza, like the rest; he could gain admittance that way without disturbing any one. Passing toward it, he went by another chamber window from which a light shone—a window from which he had more than once watched a girlish figure prowling in the grounds. A grim smile broke over his face as he watched that glimmering star of light.

"Hunted down, Lucy," he was mentally saying, as he went on to his own room. "Sleep to-night, my dear girl, your time comes to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXIII.

UNMASKED.

THE first morning sunbeams, glancing through the eastern windows of Torwood Towers, shone on Lucy Torwood, standing before the antique mirror in her chamber, smoothing her pretty flaxen hair. Perhaps it was the deep mourning she wore, perhaps it was the altered expression of face, but she seemed to have grown ten years older in scarcely that number of months. The delicate rose-bloom that had made her so fresh and pretty, had all departed with the winter's sun; the oval cheeks had two deep hollows, there were conspicuous lines seaming the once satin-smooth forehead and the delicate mouth. But the eyes—those pretty soft blue eyes—had changed more than all. Not in color, of course; the spring sky, in which the sun shone so brilliantly this genial morning, was not clearer nor bluer; but all their gentle quietude, all their peaceful tranquillity was gone. Wild, startled, restless, they flitted from subject to object with a strange, fluttering glance of affright, never resting long anywhere, always watchful, always waiting, always on the alert. Her black dress fitting her slight figure to perfection, her spotless collar and cuffs, her hair shining like pale gold, she looked very good and pretty still, but not as Lucy Torwood used to look. Something had

changed her, and not for the better. People said her sister's dreadful and mysterious disappearance had broken her heart, and what everybody says, you know, must be true.

On the bed, her short black hair all tossed and disordered, her cheeks flushed with youth and healthful sleep, her gipsy face resting on her arm, lay Madge, fast asleep.

As Lucy finished her toilet and turned to leave the room, she stood for an instant by the bedside, looking down at the sleeping face. Startlingly like her lost sister's in its repose, that wild, dark face was; too restless and changeable, in her waking hours, for the resemblance to strike you; but in sleep, save for the bright bloom of color, you might have fancied Edith lay before you.

"How like! how like!" Lucy said, low, to herself, her lips trembling; "and she grows more like her every day. Madge's face haunts me like the ghost of the dead now!"

Madge, as if conscious, even in slumber, of her sister's steady gaze, moved uneasily, and murmured something as she turned on her pillow and slowly opened her black eyes.

"Are you there, Lucy?" she asked, raising herself on her elbow, with a yawn. "What's the morning like?"

But Lucy was gone down-stairs and into the drawing-room, throwing open windows and doors to the fresh breeze.

Everything in that room was unchanged; the old organ kept its place still, though the fingers that had once evoked such melody from its yellow keys

were perhaps moldering into dust; the canaries sang in their cages, and the flower-stands filled the windows; Madge's straw hat lay in one corner, her mantle in another; the piano stood open, as she had left it last night; Madame Torwood's chair stood in state in its place in the "ingle nook," and Judge Torwood, grim and awful in his judicial ermine, stared on all from above the mantle.

Lucy, standing beside the piano, looking out at the shining sea, let her fingers stray over the keys, and began, very softly, and half-unconsciously, to sing:

"And the stately ships go on
To the haven under the hill;
And, oh, for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

"Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, oh, sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me!"

She stopped as suddenly as she had begun; something seemed to rise in her throat and choke her. She stopped singing, to go out and attend to her housekeeping duties; but the instant she turned to the door a shrill cry broke from her, and she bounded back as if she had seen a ghost.

Standing in the doorway, with folded arms, not unlike a tall, dark ghost, Colonel Stuart stood, as unexpected as if he had risen out of the ground.

"Good morning, Miss Torwood," he said, advancing as composedly as if they had only parted nine hours instead of nine months before. "I have startled you, I am afraid."

He might well say so. She was standing, holding by the piano with her left hand, while her right was pressed over her heart. Her parted lips told how it was throbbing; her face, pale before, had become perfectly colorless; and her eyes, those startled eyes, had dilated to twice their natural size.

"I have come upon you too suddenly," he said, advancing, and really a little alarmed. "You look ill; had you not better sit down?"

She took him at his word, sinking into a chair beside the window, her hand still over her throbbing heart.

"It is nothing. I am very foolish; but I have grown so nervous of late, the least thing startles me. And you—you appeared so suddenly so——"

She stopped, looking at him, with the same strange glance of affright.

"So unexpectedly," said Colonel Stuart, advancing into the room; "yes, I know I am an unlooked for, very likely an unwelcome, guest. But I shall not trouble Torwood Towers long with my presence. I leave at noon in the steamer."

"So soon! It was scarcely worth your while to come at all."

"I have come on business, not for pleasure. Very disagreeable business, Miss Torwood; very painful to me, very painful to others, but unavoidable. That business is with *you*."

"With me!" the pale lips faltered.

"With you, Miss Torwood," Colonel Stuart reiterated, fixing his strong blue eyes with a powerful glance on the shrinking face; "and I think you divine beforehand to what it relates."

She tried to look him in the face, and deny, but she could not. The blue eyes, that could be so kindly and genial, were terribly stern and relentless now. She dared not lie in this truthful, searching light, and the shrinking face turned to the window, and the frightened eyes averted themselves steadily from that moment.

He drew a chair up near to where she sat, and leaned forward, speaking low, and never taking his eyes off her, though he could not see her face.

"Where is my mother?" he asked.

"In her room," Lucy answered, in a voice so tremulous that the words were scarcely intelligible.

"And Madge?"

A shout outside answered—Madge was coming down-stairs, calling to Lucy as she came.

"Good! We can talk without fear of interruption Miss Torwood, I have a story to tell you—a somewhat lengthy one, but I think you will find it interesting."

"I—I am busy—I have so much to attend to mornings," faltered the frightfully tremulous voice.

"Pardon me, too, if I tell you that you must wait, for the story I have to tell is even more important than your housekeeping duties. It takes me some time back—let me see, over twenty-four years ago, perhaps twenty-five, when a certain young judge in this country married a rich heiress, who brought him not only a fortune in money, but a valuable estate, servants, etc. Among these servants was a mulatto girl named Huldah—perhaps you may have heard it before; an uncommonly intelligent girl, able to read and write, and trusted more



as a friend than a slave by her mistress. In return, Huldah idolized this mistress, would have gone through fire and water to serve her, and the idolatry extended to her mistress' child. From her very birth, Huldah doted on this child, she became little Lucy's nurse—they named the child Lucy, Miss Torwood, and her own mother could not have loved her better than this slave foster-mother did. But there soon came changes; the real mother died, and a very short time afterward the bereaved husband brought home a new wife.

"The first wife's family estate was sold, with it the servants, to raise money, for the judge, it seems, was an extravagant man, and the young bride had expensive tastes. Huldah went with the rest; I have no doubt she made a terrible scene before leaving, for she was a woman of violent temper; but the judge was a stern man—his word was law, and she had to go.

"You may know how deeply she felt it when I tell you the shock turned her brain. Huldah went mad, and with her madness came its cunning. She managed to make her escape not long afterward, and for many years was wandering about the country, finding food and shelter as best she might. After many years she came back to her native place; some of the negroes who had known her in other days built her a rude hut in the woods, and Huldah took to fortune-telling for a living.

"She looked witch-like enough to be able to predict the future, and found plenty of believers to come stealthily after nightfall to the lonesome hut in the black heart of the cedar woods. Delicate

young ladies, Miss Torwood, have gone there before now, stealing through the darkness, when they dared not face the light to plot evil with the dark seeress. Perhaps I tire you with a long preamble about a wretched escaped slave and vagrant lunatic; but it is necessary, that you may the better understand my story."

He tried to see her face, but he could not. He only saw her desperately clutching the window sill with one hand in a desperate clutch, but for all that she shook like one in an ague. Morally and physically, Lucy Torwood was a coward. Colonel Stuart had some one very different from Huldah Black to deal with now. He went on after a moment's pause, during which the beating of the girl's frightened heart was plainly audible.

"The judge's second wife shared the fate of his first, leaving three daughters, Edith, Florence and Madge—familiar names, Miss Torwood. Edith was born in Cuba, and resided there with a maternal aunt. Florence was sent to school, and the youngest and eldest sister remained at home.

"The judge in the fullness of time, took a third wife and went abroad with her. Abroad he died, leaving a singular will, every word of which was prompted, I have no doubt, by the third wife, under whose influence he was as plastic as wax. It bequeathed the larger half of his wealth and the family homestead to whichever of his four daughters should become the bride of this third wife's son. Very romantic; very like something in a novel, but very unfair, do you not think so, Miss Torwood?"

He might as well have spoken to the window, out

of which she was looking, for all the signs she made of hearing him.

"Your namesake, the Lucy I speak of, thought so, at all events; and most bitterly resented the wrong that had been done her. She was rather a strange girl, this Lucy—outwardly the quietest and gentlest of creatures, inwardly crafty, designing, ambitious, longing for wealth, and the power wealth gives, and quite unscrupulous what means she took to gain her ends, so that these means were not found out. By stealth she discovered and read the will, or rather a copy of it forwarded by her father's widow from Italy, and from that time her mind was made up to be the fortunate sister, and inherit her father's wealth. Her sisters Florence and Madge, as rivals, she did not particularly fear, but of Edith she knew nothing:

"In order to find out what kind of a person Edith was, she sent Huldah, the mulatto I spoke of, Miss Torwood, all the way to Cuba, with full directions to discover her sister. Huldah fulfilled her mission well, and returned with full particulars about the time the widow also came. Her son and the two absent sisters were sent for, and the first act of the play began."

Colonel Stuart stopped. There had been a gasp, a fluttering movement of one hand, a partial turning of the head, and he thought she was going to speak. She did not, however, and he resumed:

"Huldah and her foster child met one dark night in the hut in the woods, and together concocted a plot, a dark and shameful plot, Miss Torwood, though it broke her sister's heart.

"Edith was engaged, as they both knew, to a gentleman more remarkable for his good looks than his steadfast principles or feelings of honor. Florence was a beauty and a flirt, and it was settled they were to be brought together in every possible way and married. That would be one sister out of the way—Edith, imperious and high-minded, detested her step-mother's son; therefore was not likely to be his wife—Madge would never suit him—Lucy was perfection, or made the world believe she was—what more natural than that the lucky man should grasp at such an angel bride, with so many dollars thrown in.

"They could calculate shrewdly, Miss Torwood, but they reckoned without their host after all. When we see a day too sunshiny we suspect it will end in storm; anything too sweet, it is well known, is never wholesome; had Lucy been a little less angelic she might have suited better, but like many other actresses, overplayed the part. From the first he suspected her, and suspicions soon became certainty—there were nocturnal meetings in the grounds with mysterious personages, and nocturnal interviews seldom are for any good; there were plots and intrigues enough for a three-volume novel, and he, at whom she was aiming, saw through, and understood it all. It pleased him, however, to play the unconscious for a time, and the pretty actress flattered herself that he, as well as the rest of the world, took the tinsel for gold.

"All her schemes seemed to be succeeding to her heart's content—the match she had made ended in every way to her contentment—the only rival she

dreaded was out of the lists, the field seemed clear to herself, when lo! in the very hour of triumph, a rival seemed rising in the sister she had feared least.

"I suppose it made her desperate to see the golden prize, for which she had plotted and schemed so long, slipping through her fingers just as it seemed her own, and a desperate woman will stoop to desperate deeds.

"Mysteriously Edith disappeared—disappeared as suddenly and unaccountably as if the ground had opened and swallowed her. All search since has been in vain, but I have never despaired of finding out what became of her. To you, Lucy Torwood, I now come—the play in which you acted so cleverly is played out—you may drop the mask you have used so long and tell the truth! Lucy Torwood, what have you done with your sister?"

She did not speak. For some time before her face had dropped on the arm resting on the window, and she had never moved since.

"Miss Torwood," he reiterated, still more sternly, "I command you to speak. Is your sister Edith living or dead?"

Still no reply, no motion that she even heard him. A little startled, he laid his hand on her shoulder to rouse her; it had no effect. Still more alarmed, he lifted her face, and his own turned white as he saw it. It dropped again, heavily—sitting there she had fainted entirely away.

How long she had been unconscious he could not tell, probably from the time her head had fallen on her arm. In considerable consternation he went out to the hall in search of help, and encountered

Rosie, the housemaid, armed with broom and dust-pan. At sight of the gentleman she dropped both and jumped back as if she had seen a ghost, her scream of surprise ringing through the hall.

"Don't make such a row Rosie; it's only I. Go get some cold water and sal volatile, and fetch them in here. Miss Lucy has fainted."

"Good Lord sir! fainted!"

"Yes; get the things I tell you at once, and attend to her. Where is Madame Torwood?"

"In her room sir. Shall I——"

"No, never mind! Attend to Miss Lucy first, and when she is restored you may tell your mistress I am here, and wish to see her as speedily as possible. The cold water will bring Miss Lucy to, I think."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CONFESSION.

COLONEL STUART went out on the piazza, and leaned over the railing to catch the fresh morning breeze. The hoarse barking of dogs came to his ear from the shrubbery, and surmising who was there he went down. Two ugly little bull-dogs were fighting furiously, and Madge, in a black straw hat, stood near, urging them on.

"Go it, Lion! At him, Tiger! That's the boy! Good old Tiger! You'll beat him yet! I knew you would."

"Good-morning, Madge," said Colonel Stuart, shouting to be heard over the uproar. "Charming employment I find you at this heavenly morning."

Madge faced round and at sight of the speaker her eyes opened to twice their usual size.

"Gracious me! My stars! Whoever would have thought it!"

"That's a nice welcome, isn't it, to one you have not seen for nearly a year? Will you shake hands and say you are glad to see me?"

Madge held out her brown digits in greeting.

"Of course I'm glad to see you. I'd be glad to see my worst enemy now for I have not seen a new face for the last three months, and I declare I'm fit to

die of the blues. Where in the world did you, of all people, drop from?"

"From New York, the last place."

"When did you come?"

"Last night. I got in without disturbing anybody, through the window."

"Did you see any of the folks yet—Lucy or your mother?"

"I have just left Miss Torwood. She has grown as thin as a shadow since I saw her last. What is the cause?"

Madge looked at him with gravely surprised eyes.

"Do you need to ask? I think we have had enough trouble of late to make the whole of us shadows. I have no doubt I would be one myself, only, you see, I have such a powerful appetite. What were you doing in New York."

"I went to New York to make a genteel call on a fair friend of mine—Mrs. Florence St. Leon, by name."

Madge's eyes flew open again.

"What! call on Florence! I don't believe it."

"Disbelieve it, then."

"Did you really, though?"

"I really did. Would you have me be impolite enough to give her the cut direct!"

"I should feel tempted to give her a cut with my horsewhip if she were near enough," said Madge, savagely. "Lion! Tiger! be still, you noisy brutes! What had you to say to Mrs. St. Leon?"

"Oh, several things, that I didn't think she cared about hearing. She is just as pretty as ever, and very popular in New York."

"Is she? Ah!" cried Madge, clawing the air viciously with her fingers, "how I wish she were within reach of my nails; wouldn't I lacerate her beauty for her! Where's he?"

"Captain St. Leon? Down South in Dixie. I live in the hope of meeting him some day, and spoiling his beauty for him. I say, Madge! why don't you ask after Lieutenant Moreen? He's quite well, though, at least as well as the poor fellow is ever likely to be in this world! There, don't blush; he told me all about it."

"Bother! Where's Angus Torwood?"

"At Washington, in the hospital—wounded, but not badly. Mr. McPherson was there, too, when I left."

"I know it; everybody's left Torwoodtown; and of all the dismal holes——" a despairing gesture finished the sentence.

"My poor Madge! And how do you manage to exist in it at all?"

"Echo answers, how? for I am sure I don't know. One dreary day drags on after another, and I gape from morning till night, and I am at this present moment on the verge of melancholy madness. If you see a paragraph in the papers before long, headed, 'Melancoly Suicide in High Life!' you may know that it refers to me without reading it. Tiger, if you don't stop that noise this minute, you'll come in for the best thrashing you have had in a month of Sundays!"

"Madge!" cried Colonel Stuart, speaking from a sudden impulse, "you want a change. Come with me to Washington."

"What to do there?"

"Anything you like. Nurse the sick in the hospital. Lots of young ladies do it."

"I should like it of all things, but, la! what's the use of talking? I won't be let!"

"Who'll hinder?"

"Why, Lucy and your mother. 'It wouldn't be proper, and it wouldn't be this, that, and the other thing.' Oh, I know!"

"You shall come if you wish it, and, neither Lucy nor my mother will object. It depends on yourself—yes or no?"

"Yes, to be sure. I'd go to Greenland for a change."

"But I leave at noon in the steamer. Can you be ready in four or five hours?"

"In half the time, sir. I'm not a young lady of furbelows and flounces, I'd have you know. Well, Rosie, what do you want?"

"A letter for you, sir," Rosie said, handing one to Colonel Stuart, "from Miss Lucy."

Madge stared.

"Never mind, Madge," said he, leisurely opening it; "it's no affair of yours, my dear; so run off and begin packing."

Madge, not quite sure that it was not all a delightful dream, darted off, and Colonel Stuart broke the seal of the letter. Lucy Torwood's delicate tracery was not quite so steady as usual, and the epistle began abruptly enough:

"If Colonel Stuart has any pity, can feel any compassion for so lost and fallen a wretch as I am, he

will depart from Torwood Towers without forcing me to see him again. For the last nine months I have been waiting for what has come to-day. I am all that you say, a base intriguer, a miserable hypocrite; you cannot loathe and despise me more than I loathe and despise myself; but I am no murderess. I was mad; I know it now; but as Heaven hears and will judge me, the worst I intended was to take Edith's lover from her, and force her back to Cuba to her friends.

"Her abduction was no work of mine. I knew nothing whatever of it; I never dreamed of such a thing; it was all the work of Huldah. I do not attempt to deny that I had plotted with Huldah; but never for that—never, never! I cannot deny either that from the first moment her loss was discovered I knew who her abductor was; but I dared not speak, I knew she was not murdered.

"Huldah confessed all to me the next time we met, and owned she had planned it all out long beforehand with the secret craftiness of the partially insane. Some friends of hers—negroes, of course—living in a wretched hut on the seashore, near the outskirts of Torwoodtown, agreed to take charge of her, and thither Huldah conveyed her in a donkey cart, that July night we missed her. The low fever burning in her veins before she left changed in the negro hut to most malignant typhus, and while you were searching for her over the country, she was lying there delirious. Heaven alone knows how I felt; but I had gone too far to recede. My coward heart would not let me speak. I feared *you*, Colonel Stuart, and the first time I dared breathe freely was when you left the Towers. If Edith lived, my intention was to have her conveyed back to Cuba; if she died—then, the secret must ever remain untold. She did not die, as I am sure, in spite of your words this morning. You know she recovered, and—escaped. How she did it, or where she went to, or

what has become of her, I know not ; but I am certain *you* do.

"Colonel Stuart, I have spoken the truth at last, Edith lives ; and if so lost a creature as I am dared thank God for anything, it would be for that. If you have any mercy, you will spare me the pain of a second interview. Some time, perhaps, I may kneel before Edith and ask her forgiveness, and her good-nature is so great she will grant it, I know. I have sinned, but I have also suffered. Even you Colonel Stuart, might feel for me a little, if you, knew how."

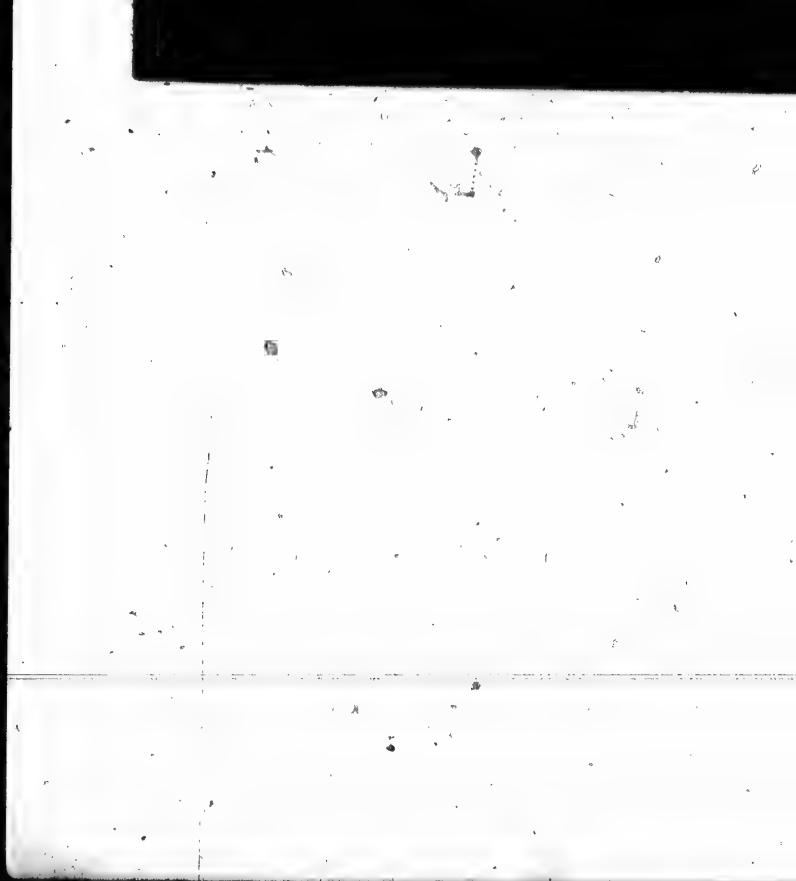
It ended as abruptly as it had begun. Colonel Stuart, refolding it with a very grave face, caught sight of Rosie, lingering still.

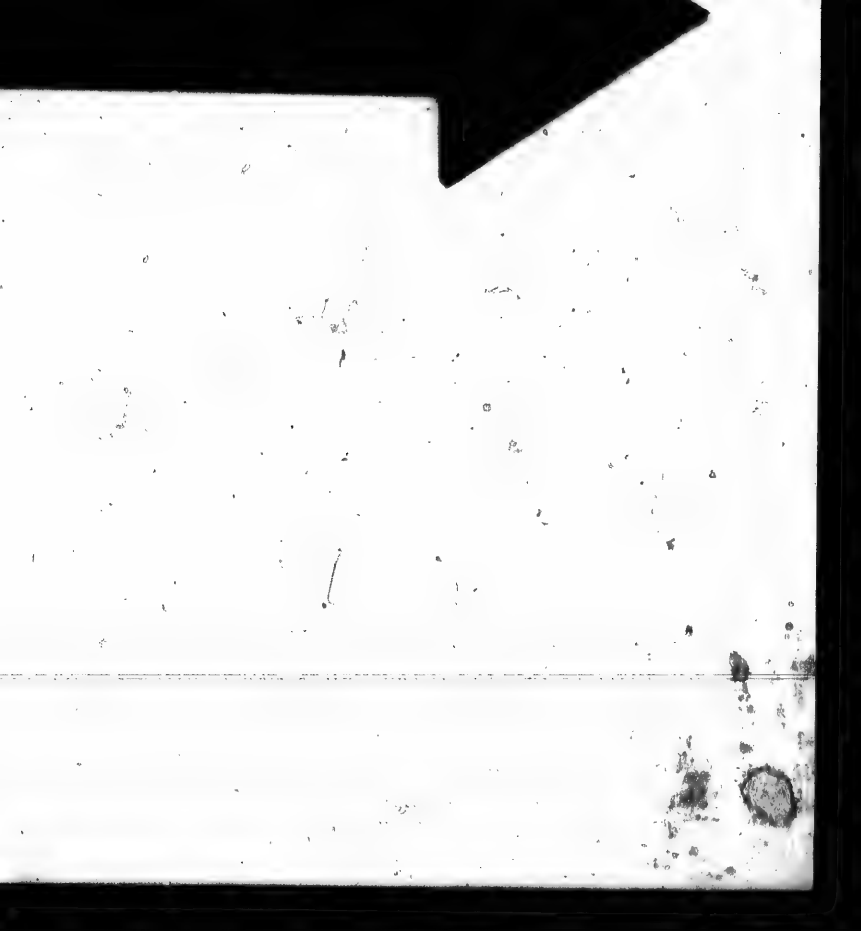
"Oh, I thought you had gone, Rosie. Do you want anything?" he asked.

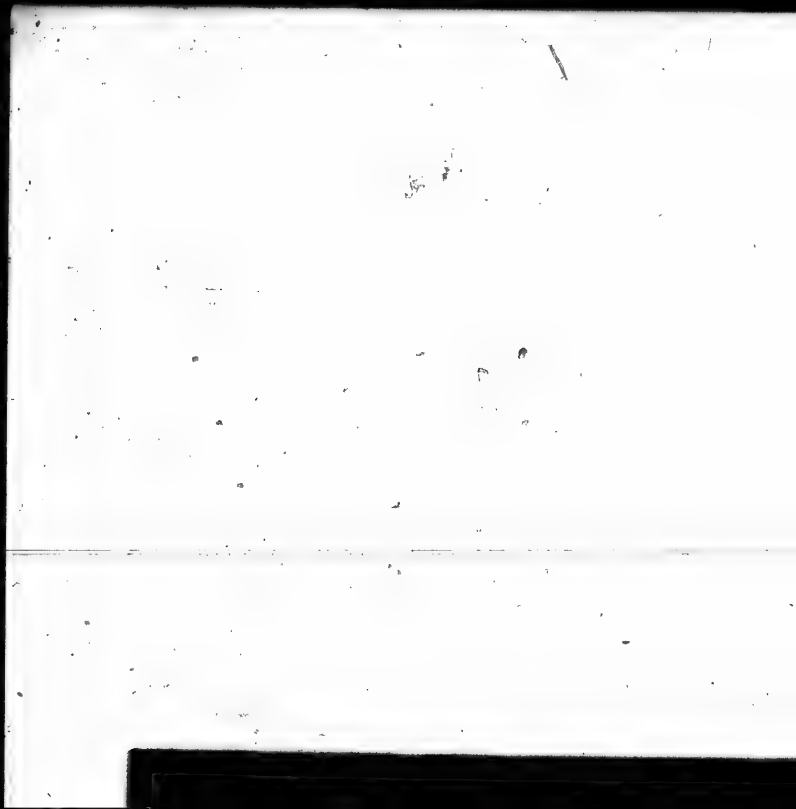
"Yes, sir ; misses is awake now, and says would you please walk up to her room at once?"

Colonel Stuart nodded, put Lucy's letter in his pocket, and walked slowly back to the house.

"So far, so well," he said to himself. "Poor Lucy ! even old Nick is not as black as he's painted, I've heard, and I believe Lucy really tells the truth at last. There's Madge at the window, all ready, I see ; so now for a parting interview with my lady mother."









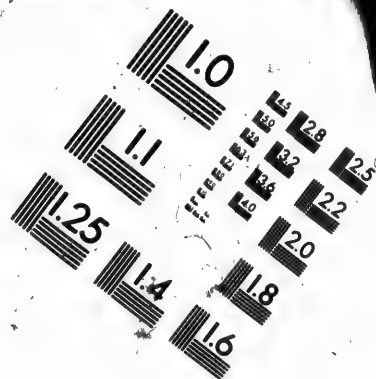
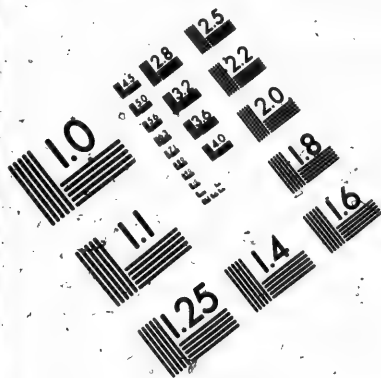
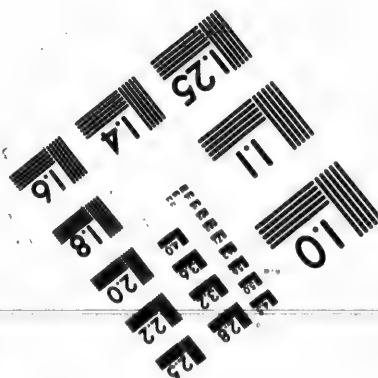
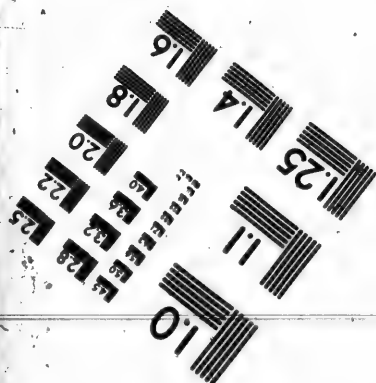
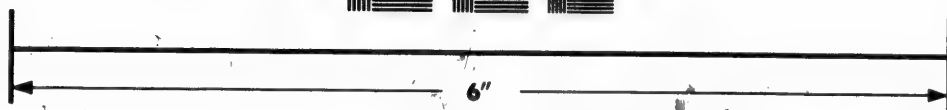
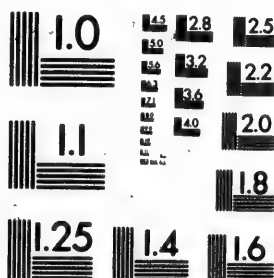


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CHAPTER XXV.

SISTER MARIE.

A foggy day, ending in sleet and snow, though it was late in spring, was closing in evening gloom over Washington City. The lamps in the long dim aisles of the hospital wards were palely glimmering on the restless sufferers, tossing drearily on their feverish beds. They glimmered on the doctors going their evening rounds, and on the black-robed figures of the Sisters of Charity, flitting from couch to couch, ministering to the sick soldiers lying thereon.

Restless on his hot bed, listening to the wailing of the raw night wind, to the sleet lashing the windows, and to the moans of his sick comrades, a soldier lay near the end of the ward. Tossing first to one side and then to the other, in the impatient way peculiar to sick men, he looked at the feeble lamps overhead, at the passing physicians and nurses with fidgety impatience, and at last hailed one of the latter going by.

"Sister Marie!"

A nun, slender of figure, youthful of face, turned at the call. Youthful of face, but startlingly colorless in the lamp-light, and lighted by a pair of luminous dark eyes. Wonderful eyes they were, full of strange power and intensity, solemn, mystic, and

melancholy. Every face, it is said, is either a history or a prophecy—hers was a history—a history of suffering and endurance; of conquered pride and rebellious spirit; of patience and waiting, calm waiting for the end.

She turned now at the sound of her name, with her large, dark, mournful eyes fixed expectantly on the patient's face.

"Do you want anything, Captain Torwood?" she asked, in a low, sweet voice, rendered most musical by a slight foreign accent.

"I want to know if there are no letters for me. It is time there were."

"There can be none, or you would have received it before now. You must learn to wait a little more patiently, or you will work yourself into a fever."

"How's a fellow to help it?" grumbled Angus, "stretched here like an overgrown baby from week's end to week's end, with nothing more exciting to happen than being stared at by visitors, or the coming of your gruel and beef-tea! I'll go mad if I'm kept here much longer."

A faint, moonlight sort of smile dawned on the pale face of Sister Marie.

"Patience, patience, Captain Torwood! You must learn, as well as the rest of the world, the great lesson of life—endurance. You are only in the alphabet now."

"I never want to get beyond it, then! Confound the colonel! why doesn't he write? I beg your pardon, sister—but he *ought* to write!"

"Is Colonel Stuart your military correspondent?"

"Yes. You see, Sister Marie," Angus said, ear-

nestly, "he has gone on most important business—nothing less than to investigate a most mysterious murder!"

"Murder!" Sister Marie faintly echoed, recoiling at the dreadful word.

"A most mysterious and shocking murder. If you ever read the papers you must have seen it. The victim was a cousin of mine, Edith Torwood was her name, one of the noblest women that ever lived; but neither her youth nor goodness could save her. She fell a victim to the jealousy and avarice of a demon in female form—her own—"

He broke off suddenly. Sister Marie, standing with averted face, had made a sudden and passionate gesture with one hand.

"Hush, hush, hush! How can you tell me of such things?" she said in a voice so agitated that he scarcely knew it. "I don't want to hear anything more about it. Is there anything I want before I go?"

"A drink, if you please. I should not have told you the story had I thought it would shock you so; but I imagined after spending three weeks here, you had grown accustomed to dreadful things?"

Sister Marie, without looking at him, or replying, filled a glass with lemonade, and handed it to him.

"Is there anything else?" she asked.

"Nothing else, thank you! Goodnight."

"Goodnight!" Sister Marie said, and with a queer look in his eyes Angus Torwood watched her gliding away, and disappearing—another shadow among the shadows.

A long hall separated the hospital from that por-

tion of the building occupied by the sisters. The pale young nun walked down the hall, and opening a door to the left, entered her own private apartment.

Sister Marie knelt down, dropping her face into her wan white hands, and remaining so motionless you might have taken her for an ebony statue. So long she knelt that the stormy evening passed into stormier night, and when she rose at last, the pale lamp-light shone on a face wet with a hot rush of tears.

Taking a seat at the window, she listened to the wind and rain. Mingled with the long and lamentable blasts came presently another sound—a carriage driving at a furious rate over the graveled drive. Directly after the door-bell rang loudly; Sister Marie heard the portress trotting leisurely along to answer the summons, and then the sound of voices in the vestibule. One was a man's voice, the deep masculine tones sounding oddly out of place in those monastic rooms. Visitors that stormy night; but it was nothing to Sister Marie—she expected none—and so sat on, dreaming and listening. Sitting thus some one who opened the door suddenly found her, and the sister turning round, saw the portress.

"You are wanted sister," she said. "There is a visitor for you."

Sister Marie rose with a startled look.

"For me? Are you sure?"

"It is Colonel Stuart. He is talking to Mother Frances now in the vestibule. It was she who sent me here for you."

Sister Marie went out without a word. In the

brightly lighted vestibule a tall figure in a wet overcoat stood, hat in hand, talking to Mother Frances, a pleasant-faced lady, of mature age. The parlor door standing open, Sister Marie caught a glimpse of a lady sitting therein, dressed in mourning; and something about her even in that fleeting glimpse made her heart give a sudden bound. Colonel Stuart and the mother were conversing earnestly, but both turned at her approach.

"Happy to see you again, Sister Marie," the colonel said, holding out his hand; "how are you and all your patients?"

"He has been asking for Captain Torwood," Mother Frances said; "he is in your ward, is he not?"

"Yes, mother, and is nearly convalescent."

"You have found him a troublesome charge, I fancy," Colonel Stuart said, smiling.

"Rather an impatient one, but not otherwise troublesome. He expected a letter from you this evening, and seemed very much annoyed at not receiving it."

"I have done better than write—I bring him all the news in person. I bring some to you also, Sister Marie."

Again Sister Marie's face took that white, startled look. It reminded Colonel Stuart of Lucy Torwood, standing that sunny spring morning by the window in the dining-room of Torwood Towers. He looked at her with a keen glance as he spoke.

"Yes, I bring a friend; a young lady who is most anxious to see you. Are you strong enough to bear a shock!"

She turned from him to the mother, her hands clasped, her lips parted:

"Oh, mother——"

"Go in, dear child," the elder lady said, looking at her with smiling eyes; "fear nothing. No one but your friends will come here."

"Is it—tell me, is it—" Sister Marie began, hurried and agitated, but the colonel interfered.

"I have promised not to tell you anything. The young lady I bring knows how to speak for herself. Come!"

He turned into the parlor. Sister Marie made no motion to follow him until the mother, still smiling encouragingly, took her by the hand and led her forward. In the blaze of the chandeliers sat a girl dressed in deep black, youthful and slender, with a pair of great black eyes flashing back the gas-light, and a jockey hat set on a profusion of black braids—for Miss Madge Torwood's locks had grown of late.

The moment Sister Marie entered she sprang up from her seat, made an impetuous rush at her, and caught her in her arms with a shrill scream of "EDITH!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

RESURGAM !

Yes, Edith ! Not dead, not lying with the fathomless sea for her winding-sheet, but sitting here in the lamp-light, with Madge clinging to her, crying, and laughing, and talking, all together, with showers between. Pale and shadowy, certainly, the dark, thin, face wasted by sickness and suffering, the old haughty look gone, the old haughty step and bearing altered, but the great, dark, solemn eyes unchanged, the old rare smile that was wont to light up the proud face so brightly, bright as ever still. Yes, Edith, risen again.

It was all over, the first agitated meeting. Questions had been asked and answered, no end of kissing and ecstatic hugging on Madge's part, and now Edith was sitting down, white and agitated, but trying hard to be calm ; and Madge was kneeling before her, her arms round her waist, her black eyes intently gazing at the Creole face, asking a shower of breathless questions. Colonel Stuart stood, as he had been standing ever since their entrance, by the window, his back to them, absorbed seemingly in looking at the black, blind night, and listening to the wild spring storm. They were alone together, for the mother had gone.

"And so you are not dead in spite of everybody

saying so, and not a nun, though you wear their dress? Well, I never!" Madge was exclaiming for the dozenth time. "I do declare it's the most wonderful affair I ever heard of—beats the 'Castle of Otranto,' and the 'Mysteries of the Forest,' all to sticks. You might have knocked me down with a feather when Colonel Stuart told me about it first. Begin at the beginning, like the author of the 'House that Jack built,' and tell us all about it."

Edith smiled—the imperative tones reminded her so of the authoritative Madge of other days.

"What do you mean by 'all about it,' *ma chère*? Do you not know all already?"

"No, nor half! I know Huldah carried you off that night in a donkey cart to some old hut outside of Torwoodtown, and that you were there crazy with brain fever! While we were going-distracted and raising the country generally in search of you. I tell you what, Edith, the war in Maryland was a small circumstance about that time compared with the hunt we had for your melancholy remains and assassins! How long were you with Huldah, anyway?"

"Over two, nearly three months. That I recovered from that dreadful fever is in itself almost a miracle. The old negress that owned that hut was doctor and nurse herself—I never saw another creature while there, except Huldah. She was kind enough to me, too, after a fashion of her own, but I fancy was heartily tired of her charge long before she was rid of me."

"What did they intend doing with you after you got well?"

"Send me back to Cuba. She who plotted it all knew me well enough to be sure I never would make the disgraceful story public."

Madge's face suddenly lengthened.

"Of all the hypocrites—but then. I'd rather not mention her, for fear I might get excited. Didn't you want to get back to Cuba?"

"Sister mine," said Edith, sorrowfully, "to whom should I have gone? My dear aunt is in heaven, and my beautiful Cuba no longer contains a home for me."

Madge administered a few consoling hugs and kisses.

"Poor, dear Edith! So you ran away?"

"I did, when I was strong enough," said Edith, smiling, "which was not for many a weary day. I knew where I was. I knew everything, in fact, just as you know it now, and I formed my own plans, and quietly bided my time."

"Was there no way in which you could have sent a message to Torwood Towers?" asked Colonel Stuart, turning his grave face from the window, and speaking for the first time. "You must have known among the rest how terribly anxious your friends would be at your loss."

Edith's luminous gray eyes lifted themselves steadily to his face.

"My friends! Madame Torwood hated me; Lucy Torwood for months had been plotting my ruin; Florence Torwood eloped with my betrothed husband; Dr. Stuart seemed only waiting to rob me of my birthright; Madge Torwood," smiling down at Madge's sober, uplifted face, "I judged to be a reck.

less romp, with no love or care for anything earthly but her dogs and horses. Who were my friends at Torwood Towers?"

"Now, if there ever was heard so ungrateful a speech!" shrilly broke out Madge. "Weren't we on the verge of killing you with kindness that time before you disappeared, when you went dawdling about, day in and day out, neither sick nor well, but just as aggravating as ever you could be?"

"Didn't Madame Torwood call you 'my dear,' three distinct times in my own hearing? didn't Lucy prepare oceans of beef-tea, and chicken broth, and calves' feet jelly, which you wouldn't eat? and didn't I make a martyr of myself every day of my life, devouring them for you."

"Didn't Dr. Stuart launch into the wildest extravagance in the way of books and magazines, and spend all his spare change buying you flowers and fruit, and various things of that sort? Then, as for Florence, you owe her more than anybody else, for if ever you came to luck in your life, Edith Torwood, it was getting rid of that mean little dandified Jackeymo St. Leon. Friends indeed! that just shows how much gratitude there is in this world!"

Madge's eloquence, when it broke forth, was like a mountain torrent, resistless. Both Edith and Colonel Stuart broke into a smile.

"I am not so ungrateful as you think, Miss Madge," Edith said, caressing the indignant face. "I remember well how kind you all were in those days; but nothing could have tempted me back to Torwood Towers. I knew I was thought to be dead. I knew

diligent search was being made for me, but my whole thought was how to evade it, to escape from you all.

"In the dead of night, when my black nurse lay buried in deepest sleep, I made my escape, found my way into the town, and next morning at daylight was ringing the bell at the convent door. The good sisters knew me well, short as my stay had been at Torwood Towers; with them I knew I was safe; with them I felt sure of a welcome and a home.

"I need not speak of the shock, the amazement, almost consternation, of the sisterhood at seeing the dead alive. I explained as much as was necessary to all except the mother—to her alone I told all, and asked for secrecy and shelter, for the present at least. I scarcely knew what I meant to do—go to the city and try to obtain, under an assumed name, a situation as governess, or something like that. I wished to take the veil, but our kind mother would not let me act on impulse. 'Wait, dear child,' she said, 'let this be your home as long as you choose, and if, after half a year, you find you really have a vocation, no one will be happier than I to receive you among us.' So, Madge, while you all were searching for some clew to the mysterious murder, the murdered one was tranquilly living in your very midst."

"And very shabby it was of you," was Madge's blunt comment, "not to say selfish. How did you know some one might not be arrested on suspicion?"

"I should have known, and in that case would have appeared; but no one was. I lived on with

the sisters, and, having no dresses of my own, assumed a habit similar to theirs, to avoid exciting remarks by peculiarity of costume. I dropped my first name of Edith, and took my second, Marie, so that I wear this recluse robe, and am called Sister Marie, without being in the least a nun."

"For which, thanksgiving! What's more, I don't believe you ever will be a nun," said Madge, her eyes twinkling. "And so, when the rest of the sisters came here to look after the wounded soldiers, Sister Marie came with them?"

"She did, very glad to get anywhere out of Torwoodtown, and here she has been since."

"And so we have got to the end of the story, by a somewhat circumbendibus route, at last," said Madge, drawing a long breath. "And now, what's the next thing that's to happen, I should like to know?"

"Should you?" said Colonel Stuart, advancing. "Don't be too impatient, my dear Madge, and you shall hear all about it. Sister Marie—Miss Torwood — By the way, mademoiselle, how are we to address you?"

"Oh, say Edith; the other two are misnomers."

"Say Edith!" mimicked Madge. "There was a time when Dr. Stuart scarcely dared to look at Miss Edith Torwood, much less pronounce her august name. But then, he's a colonel now, and time and military buttons do work wonders."

The old wicked light sparkled in the laughing blue eyes. Colonel Stuart turned on Edith, and Edith's pallor lapsed for a moment into "celestial rosy red."

"There was a time, little sister, when I did not know my friends from my enemies," Edith said, her sweet voice trembling a little; "but that time is past, and forever. I know Colonel Stuart far better than I ever did Dr. Stuart."

"And like him a little better, I hope," said outspoken Madge; "he is not so utterly depraved, after all. Even Old Harry, they say, is not as black as he is painted."

Colonel Stuart made Madge a bow.

"I appreciate the compliment, mademoiselle. Do you remember," turning to Edith, "the morning after your arrival here?"

"When I encountered you, and Angus, and Mr. McPherson?" she said, looking amused. "Is it likely I shall forget it?"

"Talk of galvanic shocks," said the colonel; "I never was so completely electrified in all my life. I was confident you were living, but I had no more idea of meeting you here than I would of meeting Madge in the wilds of Kamschatka. I frightened Angus out of a year's growth, I believe, too."

"What a mercy you did not swoon in somebody's arms," said Madge, turning up the whites of her eyes. "How did you scare Mr. Torwood?"

"By whispering in his ear one little phrase, '*Edith is here!*' The cry he gave at the announcement brought up Mr. McPherson, and Angus afterward told him all. Did you really think you were unrecognized, Edith?"

"I really did. I knew my illness had altered me; and then there was my disguise—my nun's dress. Angus sometimes gave me reason to think he sus-

pected; but you were all very discreet, Colonel Stuart."

"Why didn't you let Edith know you recognized her?" was Madge's sensible question, and Colonel Stuart laughed.

"One of my whims, I suppose. I had a fancy for finding out the whole thing first, by myself—the pretense being to know for certain whether or not she really were a Sister of Charity."

"That was nothing to you, I should think," said Madge.

"Wasn't it?" replied Colonel Stuart, with a queer look. "I found out my way from Mother Frances, and thus set out for New York, where Florence was, and is, flourishing like a queen, to begin my investigation. A rare fright I gave Mrs. St. Leon, and in her terror she made an open confession of all. I had long ago suspected Lucy; but my suspicions became certainty then. I returned to Torwood, had an interview with Huldah, who proved obdurate as a rock, and would reveal nothing. It mattered little, however. I knew I could force a confession of guilt from Lucy herself, and did so, before I saw you next morning, Madge."

"It seems to me you took a great deal of trouble for nothing," was Madge's comment. "You saw somebody else before you left, too."

"My mother—yes; and that reminds me she will be here to-morrow to take charge of you again, Miss Madge, and to—to welcome you, Edith, back to life."

"She is very kind," Edith said, shrinking a little, however, at the idea of meeting her frigid step-mother.

Colonel Stuart saw it.

"I assure you," he said, earnestly, "you will find her as greatly changed as yourself, and sincerely glad to see you. Her wish was that you should leave this place, and remain with her while she stays in Washington."

"No," said Edith, quietly, but resolutely; "I shall remain here. Madge, of course, will stay with her; but this is my home."

"Until you return to Torwood Towers you mean."

"I am not sure that I shall ever return there, Colonel Stuart—never, at least——"

She stopped; but he understood her.

"While Lucy is there. Can Sister Marie not forgive and forget?"

"I have forgiven long ago—forgotten is quite another matter. Lucy would no more wish to see me there than I should wish to go."

"I fancy Lucy will have the grace to leave Torwood altogether before long; so that obstacle will be withdrawn. And now I must go, I suppose, or Mother Frances will be for turning me out. Madge, they will take care of you here for to-night; to-morrow my mother will resume possession. You will not object to seeing her, Edith?"

"Certainly not, Colonel Stuart."

"Can't I see Angus to-night?" asked Madge. "I know you are going, Colonel Stuart—suppose you take me with you."

"Too late, *ma chère*," said Edith. "Wait until to-morrow, and I will take you."

"Good-night, then," said the colonel, taking up his hat. "I shall see you both early to-morrow."

Edith looked at him wistfully.

"I have not thanked you yet, Colonel Stuart, and I owe you a great deal. How am I to prove I am not, as Madge says, ungrateful?"

He turned round with the old bright smile she remembered so well.

"By granting me a boon I am going to ask before long."

She looked puzzled.

"What is it? I don't understand."

"Madge is listening, and might be scandalized," he said, laughing. "I can't explain now. You shall have a chance to prove your gratitude, though, Miss Edith, before long; and so, good night."

CHAPTER XXVII.

POSSIBILITIES.

"MAN proposes," so do young ladies occasionally, and with the same result. Edith had made up her mind to stay in the hospital; but when Madame Torwood came there in state, in a grand barouche, her graceful form enveloped in a stylish velvet mantle, her broad flounces redolent of perfume, her cobweb handkerchief moist with penitent tears, and descending gracefully into the Valley of Humiliation, implored forgiveness for the past, and friendship for the future, Edith could not refuse. Neither could she, when implored, as a proof of that forgiveness, decline visiting madame in her hotel; so, half-yielding, half-reluctant, the great lady carried her point and her Creole step-daughter back with her, and, what was more, had kept her ever since. Marvelous was the change that had come over the spirit of madam's dream. Edith was in a fair way of being killed with kindness in her step-mother's extreme solicitude to atone for the past; and Edith being a good Christian, as you all know, could do no less than smoke the pipe of peace, and submit to being called "my love," and kissed every night and morning, with a good grace.

In a pretty sitting-room, looking out on a long street, a young lady sat in a low rocking-chair,

swaying to and fro, and alternately watching the stream of restless life below and reading the morning paper. A young lady, tall and slender, black-eyed and curly-haired, whose rosy cheeks and crimson Zouave jacket were of much the same shade, and whose restless foot beat somebody's tattoo on the carpet impatiently while she rocked.

It was Miss Madge Torwood, of course, who unable to scour the country as of yore, the moment she was out of dreamland, was sitting thus arrayed for the day at eight in the morning, waiting for somebody to come and call her to breakfast.

Meanwhile, by way of sharpening her appetite for that meal, she was devouring the latest news from the seat of war. A skirmish had taken place somewhere, with no decisive results on either side, and Madge was deep in the dismal details, when the door opened, and somebody came in. Down went the paper, and up jumped the youngest Miss Torwood.

"Is breakfast read— Why, good gracious me! Angus Torwood! you never mean to say this is you?"

For instead of Fifiue, madam's maid, who had come with her from Torwood, a pale, hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed vision, in the blue and gold of Uncle Sam's service, stood before her, chapeau in hand.

"It's all that's left of me," said Captain Torwood. "How do you do this morning, Madge? Reading the news?"

Madge, with her black eyes very wide open in her astonishment, pushed a chair toward him.

"Sit down! Who on earth would ever think of seeing you at this hour of the day? Has the hospital taken fire, and have they turned you out on the charity of the world, to cool yourself? I declare you look as if you had been dead a week, and somebody had dug you up."

"Thank you, Miss Torwood! you always were more candid than polite. I suppose the rest of the good folks are not up yet?"

"Up yet!" reiterated Madge, in tones of piercing shrillness; "if folks *will* sit up to three or four o'clock in the morning, they can't be expected to get out of bed at day-dawn. I say it's a downright scandal burning gas and candles and saving the sun the way people do in this house, and I mean to give Edith a piece of my mind about it just as soon as she makes her appearance."

"What kept Edith up to three or four in the morning?" inquired Captain Torwood, hooking a stool toward him with the head of his cane, and resting his feet thereon.

"How do I know? Settling the affairs of State with Colonel Stuart and his mamma. I went down this morning just to see, and, if you'll believe me, the candles, six long wax candles, lighted for the first time at half-past eight last night, were burned clear down before these three left the parlor last night."

"Is it possible?" said Angus, smiling at Madge's indignant solemnity; "and why didn't Madge make one of the party?"

"For the very best of reasons, they wouldn't let me! Oh, no! it would never do for me to hear

their secrets, so I was politely turned out. But the next time they do it," cried Madge, glaring at vacancy, "I'll listen at the keyhole, I will, so help me! The Torwoods are getting mean enough for anything—there's Lucy turned out a sinner and a reprobate on the face of the earth; there's Florence running away with another girl's property; there's yourself getting bullets in your system, all in pursuit of glory; there's Edith going to marry Paul Stuart, after pretending to hate the very ground he walked on. I don't know what things are coming to, but I do know this world is all a fleeting show, as Mr. Moore remarks, and nobody in it can be trusted as far as you can see him or her, and I'll listen at the keyhole if they won't let me in—you see if I don't, that's all!"

"How do you know Edith is going to be married to Colonel Stuart?" Angus asked.

"How do I know!" retorted Madge, in high tones of scorn. "How do I know the sun is shining up in the sky there! Because I see it. Don't I know he is going to buy Torwood Towers from his mother—it's hers now, it seems—buy it at whatever Mr. McPherson and a lot of others may value it at; and don't I know he refused to have anything to do with that will, and that we four girls are to get our equal share of papa's money, as if the will had never been made; and I know that Lucy and Madame Torwood are going off to Europe together; and I know what's worst of all, that I'm to be sent to school, as if I wasn't learned enough for everything now, and to a convent at that! I wish the convent joy that gets me, anyhow; they'll be just

as sorry for having me there as I am to go, or my name's not Madge!"

"And how have you found out all this, pray? At the keyhole?" inquired Angus.

Madge nodded, mysteriously.

"Never you mind, Captain Torwood. I've found it out, and that's enough. Will you go to Edith's wedding?"

"If I am asked—certainly."

"Oh, you will! There *was* a time—but no matter—you might blush if I allude to it. I suppose you'll be off, going to the war again, and getting a few more bullets into you now that you're able to be about?"

"Would you be sorry, Madge?"

"Sorry for what?"

"If I were shot."

"Yes, I would," said Madge, snappishly. "Who do you suppose wants to wear bombazine and black crape now that the hot weather's coming on? If it was the fall now it would be different, but I dare say you'll go and get killed the first thing, just for contrariness; it would be exactly like you men to do it!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A NEW FRIEND.

"My dear Madge," said Angus, "it seems to me you're cross this morning, aren't you? Is it for want of your breakfast, or——"

A tap at the door interrupted him. It was Edith, dressed in black, still her favorite hue, but with knots of purple ribbon relieving its somberness, and with bows of purple in her shining dark hair. She was looking infinitely better than on the night of Madge's arrival. Edith must have found some elixir of life in those few days, for she looked a new being. Her astonishment at seeing her cousin almost equaled that of Madge.

"Why, Angus," she said, coming forward with outstretched hand, "is it possible! Who would have expected to see you here!"

Angus laughed.

"Madge says I look as if I had been dead and dug up; but she can't say the same of you. You are as blooming as a rose, Edith."

"Oh, to be sure," said Madge, "sitting up to the small hours and sleeping until noon is enough to make a howling wilderness bloom." (Madge's similes were always rather wild, if you remember.) "I hope you three settled the whole thing for good last night."

"Settled what?"

"Your wedding, of course, if you must have it in plain English! When is it to be?"

"Madge!"

"That's no answer to my question. If you won't tell me, I mean to ask Colonel Stuart, when he comes, and not wear myself to skin and bone with suspense as I am doing. Who's this? Come in?"

Another tap at the door; this time Madame Torwood sailed in, in a vast white wrapper, holding a letter in her hand. As a matter of course, she, too, was surprised at sight of Angus at such an hour, particularly as it was his first time out.

"Dear me, Captain Torwood! What an unexpected pleasure! When did you come?"

"Half an hour ago. I had a presentiment Madge might be out of humor, and stepped in to soothe her."

"Very polite of you, I am sure. Edith, I have a letter for you."

"For me!" exclaimed Edith; "from whom?"

"You never would guess! From Lucy!"

She held out a tiny note, superscribed in the delicate chirography of Lucy Torwood, Madge whistled, Angus looked grave, and Edith's face flushed as she tore it open. Very short it was—only two lines, but tears sprang to Edith's eyes as she read them.

"MY SISTER:—I am very sorry for what I have done. Forgive me—I shall never forgive myself."

"Lucy."

"Has she told you she is going away, Edith?"

asked madam, as Edith stood silent with the note in her hand.

"No, madam."

"Where is she going to?" asked fierce Madge.

"Mr. and Mrs. Emory are going to Baltimore this week, and have invited her to accompany them. She will go, she says, and stay until I call for her. So, Edith, my dear, there will be nothing to prevent you and Paul from going to Torwood Towers immediately after the ceremony!"

"After what ceremony?" inquired Madge, with an innocent face.

"My dear Madge, little girls should be seen and not heard. Captain Torwood, you will stay and breakfast with us. Come along, it is waiting."

"Oh, be joyful!" cried Madge, springing up. "Captain Torwood, permit me to offer you my arm to the breakfast parlor. You don't look fit for such a journey unaided. We'll give you something better than the gruels and dry toast 'Sister Marie' used to dose you with in the hospital!"

As they all took their places round the table, and Madame Torwood was chattering away among the cups and saucers, Fifiue put in her head all streaming with pink ribbons.

"Colonel Stuart is below, madam, and wants to see you."

"So early! Tell him to come up."

Colonel Stuart came hastily up-stairs, and made his appearance in the breakfast room.

"Good morning, all! I thought I should find you here, Torwood. Have you heard the news?"

"What news?" asked his mother. "Will you take a cup of tea?"

"Thank you. You haven't heard it, then? You know there came a lot of wounded late last night to the hospital?"

"Yes," said Angus, to whom he spoke.

"Well, sir," said Colonel Stuart, stirring his tea, "this morning I went the rounds, and whom do you suppose I saw in the very bed you so lately vacated?"

"I couldn't guess."

"Captain Giacomo St. Leon."

There was a general exclamation, and Madge's tea, in her surprise, went the wrong way, and nearly choked her. The diversion caused by this was some time in subsiding, and by the time it was over, so was the first shock of the announcement.

"Nobody else," said Colonel Stuart, "and with his right arm off, poor fellow. It was he knew me first—a saber cut across the face, received long ago, has altered him so, I should never have recognized him. He bears his misfortune like a man I must say, and seemed only too glad to have fallen into my hands."

They were all silent for a few minutes. Madge looked cunningly at Edith, but Edith's face was thoughtful and serious, nothing more. St. Leon was to her as an utter stranger now.

"Does the saber cut spoil his good looks?" Madge asked, a little disappointed at her sister's composure.

"More's the pity—yes. St. Leon can never set up for a lady-killer again."

"I should think it would worry him horribly—I know it would me if I lost mine!"

"My dear Madge, what are you talking about! You have none to lose!"

Madge dropped her knife and fork with an ominous clatter, but madam interfered.

"Madge, be quiet. Paul, you ought to know better! He bears his afflictions with fortitude, then—Who would ever think he was such a Christian?"

"He bears them like a philosopher, not like a Christian. What is to be will be, is his motto still. Besides," and Colonel Stuart's eyes looked roguish. "he is married, and what odds about a married man's looks!"

Edith smiled, but her face looked serious still.

"Does he speak of his wife?" asked Angus.

"Yes, he wants to see her very much, and I telegraphed to New York before I came here. She ought to be with him by the end of the week."

"Do you think she will come?"

"I am sure of it; Florence will not disregard a letter from me; she stands in wholesome awe of me of late. Edith, don't look so solemn—what are you thinking about?"

"Captain St. Leon, of course," said Madge's overpert tongue.

"Yes," said Edith, lifting her dark eyes quietly; "of course the loss of his arm ends his soldiering. What are he and Florence to do when he recovers?"

"He is going to his friends in Connecticut, if he can manage to get there; he is a prisoner of war, you know, now. Then there is Florence's dowry—they'll manage, I dare say."

"What are his friends in Connecticut?"

"Farmers, I believe," answered Edith; "they

will hardly suit Florence after her gay life in New York. I am very sorry for Captain St. Leon."

"I mean to go to see him," said Madge, "and be a ministering angel, and all that sort of thing to him, until Florence comes. May I, Colonel Stuart?"

"I'll speak to St. Leon about it, my dear. Will you go, Edith?"

"If he would like to see me—certainly."

"Won't it be a meeting?" said Madge, bounding up and coming down in her chair in little ecstatic springs, "and when Mrs. St. Leon comes, Barnum's happy family will be nothing to it. Lucy ought to be here to clap the climax."

"Madge, I am ashamed of you!" said Angus, putting on a paternal air, as they moved from the table; "forget and forgive; there is nothing like it."

"It's lately you found it out then. When you tried to blow St. Leon's brains out in Torwoodtown, you did not think so."

"As you are strong, be merciful, Madge. I have learned more than that lately—among the rest, that you are growing exactly like Edith."

"Only ever so much better-looking, you might have manners to add; but manners and you might be married, for you are no relations."

"Relations get married sometimes; there are such things as dispensations. Are you off again, Colonel?"

"I believe so; you need not hurry, though. I have something to attend to, and must. Good-by Madge," he said, speaking low, "I don't believe we will let you go to school, after all. I have another plan in my head, and will tell you all about it next time I come."

CHAPTER XXIX.

FLORENCE AND HER HUSBAND.

A PAIR of handsome horses, glittering in silver-plated harness, and drawing an elegant barouche, came prancing through one of the principal streets of Washington. It was a sunny afternoon, one week after that imperative telegram had gone from that imperative gentleman, Colonel Stuart, to a certain beautiful lady in New York, and the prancing horses and elegant barouche drew up with a flourish in front of the stylish hotel where Colonel Stuart's mother at present resided. A lady, young and fair as a vision, lying back languidly among the velvet cushions, her dress of silver-gray silk falling around her, her long velvet mantle hanging in costly folds from her sloping shoulders, her bonnet the perfection of millinery art, her filmy lace veil and little pink parasol protecting her primrose face from the too ardent glance of the sun, got up as it stopped, and held out her daintily gloved hand to be helped to alight. The crowd of loungers on the hotel steps, and the throng of passers-by, stared hard, in curiosity and admiration at the stylish figure and beautiful face, and the young lady bore the scrutiny with the easy air of one quite used to it.

"You will wait for me," she said to the driver, "I will be back directly."

Gathering up the sweeping amplitude of her silken skirts in her gloved fingers, she was about to trip up the steps when she found herself suddenly accosted. Another young lady, much less magnificently arrayed, walking along, with her hands stuck in her jacket pockets, a coquettish little hat stuck rakishly on top of her head, her black eyes beaming on society as it moved past, had made a dart forward, with a cry of "*It is!*" and standing before the beauty in silver-gray, fluted out her skirts in an elaborate bow, and began, with the greatest *empressment*:"

"How do you do, Mrs. St. Leon? *How* do you do? Delighted of all things to see you again, I am sure."

The lady turned a pair of violet eyes on the gipsy face of the speaker, and holding out her hand with languid grace, made a feeble attempt at a kiss through her veil.

"Ah, Madge, is it you? How do you do, and how are all the rest?"

Madge, totally ignoring the proffered kiss, gingerly touched the kidded fingers held out, and dropped them again as if they had been red-hot.

"Everybody's in splendid condition, and will be enchanted to set *you* of all people, Edith particularly! How glad you must be to meet her again!"

The loungers, looking and listening with vivid interest, saw a quick, hot flush overspread the fair face of Mrs. St. Leon. Even obtuse Florence felt Madge's cutting words, and had the grace to feel ashamed. In a letter, following the telegram,

Colonel Stuart had entered into particulars, and Florence knew as much as was necessary of Edith's story.

"Is she here?" she asked, glancing up at the front windows of the hotel.

"Up-stairs with Madame Torwood and Colonel Stuart, and Cousin Angus. Oh," here Madge, performing a little ecstatic caper in her delight, "*won't* it be a happy meeting!"

"Here, let us go up," said Florence, a little crossly; "everybody is staring! How is Giacomo?"

"Just as bad as ever he can be, and shouting for you all the time like sixty," inventing her facts as she went along; "he has been up in the highest of fevers, they say, and raving fit to raise the roof. I haven't seen him myself—my nerves couldn't stand it; but they say he is perfectly awful!"

"Has Edith been to see him?" Florence ventured, with hesitation.

"Where was the use; he wouldn't know her. Besides, Edith has something else to do now besides trotting around to hospitals looking after raving mad soldiers. Don't you know she's going to be married?"

"No! is she? To Colonel Stuart?"

"Exactly; and she is going to reign like a queen at Torwood Towers! You know Colonel Stuart is richer than any Christian man has a right to be, and Edith is to have diamonds and things, bushels of them, if she chooses, and two or three French maids to comb her hair and fix her every day, and millions of lovely silk dresses, be-yautiful bonnets, and oh, my!" Madge cried, the English language failing in

her raptures, "I couldn't begin to tell you all the things she's going to have!"

Madge had threatened more times than once to lacerate Florence's pretty face with her finger-nails if they ever met. They *had* met at last, and she was doing worse, lacerating her frivolous heart with envy. With a bitter sigh, she listened to her younger sister's glowing account, and wished with all her heart she had been less in a hurry to run off with Giacomo St. Leon.

"Here we are," exclaimed Madge, flinging open a door, and sailing into a large room, with Florence in tow. "Ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. St. Leon!"

Madame Torwood, Angus Torwood, Edith Torwood, and Colonel Stuart, all were there, and all arose. There was an awkward little pause, which Madge enjoyed beyond everything, and then Colonel Stuart came forward, with extended hand and smiling face.

"I am very glad to see you, Mrs. St. Leon—we are *all* glad to see you! Have you just come?"

"Yes," Florence said falteringly, and Madame Torwood swept up to shake hands. "How do you do, Mrs. St. Leon?" she said, but it was very coldly said, indeed. "Edith, my dear——"

She stopped. Edith, a little paler, a little graver than usual, had taken both Florence's hands in hers, and kissed her.

"I am glad to see you, Florence," was all she said, and Florence, to the surprise of everybody, threw her arms round her neck, and broke into a hysterical storm of tears.

"Oh Edith, oh Edith! how can you ever forgive

me!" was her cry, and then her voice was lost in violent sobs.

"Dear Florence, it is all over and gone. I have forgiven you long and long ago," Edith said, as much surprised as the rest at the unlooked-for outburst.

"There is some good in her, after all," thought Colonel Stuart, turning to the window, and Madge gave vent to her feelings in a long, wailing whistle.

But it was only momentary; Florence's emotions were in a very flimsy condition at the best, and never lasted long. A perfumed and lace-bordered handkerchief wiped away the last tears, and she was sitting down on the sofa between Edith and Angus, quite herself again.

"There is no danger of Giacomo dying, is there?" she was asking. "Madge says he is in a dreadful fever, and knows no one."

Colonel Stuart laughed, and Edith looked shocked.

"Nothing of the sort, Florence! Madge, I am really surprised at you! How can you say such things!"

"Well, I heard somebody saying yesterday he was feverish," said Madge, "and if he is not delirious he might be. I am sure I would be if my right arm was cut off!"

"It's so horrid," said Florence, in the tone of an injured person, "to have one's husband going about all his life with only one arm. I don't see why he couldn't have been more careful! I told him before he went away he would come back a fright, and now he sees whether I was right or not."

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," said Madge, while Edith and Madame Torwood looked

very grave, Colonel Stuart and Angus exchanged smiles, "disgracing his wife and sisters-in-law, with only one arm, not to speak of an ugly gash across his face that makes him look worse than a live gorilla. If I were Florence, I would sue for a divorce!"

"Madge, hold your tongue," said Madame Torwood. "Mrs. St. Leon, I beg you will pay no attention to your sister—she has not seen your husband at all."

"I ought to go, I suppose," said Florence, with a sigh of resignation; "Edith I wish you would come with me—I don't want to go alone."

Edith rose at once and left the room to get ready. She had visited Captain St. Leon already—it had been a very quiet meeting, so composed on her part that you might have thought she had never seen him before. She was back in a few minutes, and Florence was bidding them good-by, and promising to return to spend the evening, led the way to the carriage.

"Madge told me that you were going to be married," she said, as they drove along; "is it true?"

Edith smiled and blushed a little. "Quite true."

"Dear me! how odd! You don't hate Colonel Stuart as much now as you used to do?"

"No," said Edith, a smile deepening at the perfectly serious question. "I was a very bad girl in those days, I am afraid."

"I am sure I never thought you would have come to marry him, of all men! What did you say when you found out Giacomo and I had run away together?"

"I don't remember, and as it is all over now, it will be as well, perhaps, not to speak of it at all."

"I know I acted badly," said Florence, whose perceptions had not grown more delicate with the passage of time; "but it was a great deal more Lucy's doings than mine. Only for her I don't believe I should ever have done it. She was awfully deceitful, wasn't she?"

Edith was silent. Florence ran on:

"I never was so frightened in all my life as when I heard you were murdered, except the night Colonel Stuart came to me in New York, and threatened such terrible things if I would not confess all I knew. Lucy wanted him so badly herself, at least she wanted his money, for she disliked him dreadfully. I should think she would feel horrid now at being found out. Where is she—moping at Torwood Towers still?"

"No; she is in Baltimore, with Mr. and Mrs. Emory."

"I suppose you will live at Torwood after you are married—where will she stay then?"

"She is going to Paris with Madame Torwood."

"Is she really? How nice that will be. Is Madge going to stop with you?"

"No, Madge is going to school for a year or two, at the end of which time she is to be married!"

"What?" exclaimed Florence, opening her eyes, "Madge married! To whom?"

"To Angus," said Edith, smiling. "Oh, I forgot it is all news to you! Madge ought to have told you that with the other items!"

"Well, I declare! How long have they been engaged?"

"Only two or three days, I believe."

"But, Edith, Angus used to be in love with you?"

"Well, he has got over it, you see, and thinks now there is nobody in the world like Madge."

"And she likes him?"

"I presume so, since she has promised so readily to be his wife."

"Well, I am surprised! What did Giacomo say when he saw you?"

"He said, 'How do you do?' I think, and several other remarks of a like nature."

"Does he look as frightful as Madge says?"

"His face is scarred, and he has lost his arm, poor fellow, but he is by no means frightful."

"I say it's too bad," Florence cried out resentfully, "that he should be made such an object of, while other men come off unhurt. I wonder how long before he is well?"

"It will be some time, I think."

"I'll never go to Connecticut—I never will!" Florence exclaimed, the thought striking her; "if there is an exchange of prisoners and he goes South again, I'll go with him; but, I'll never go down East among his friends, and so I mean to tell him! Where are Madge and Angus going to reside?"

"Angus owns an estate in Cuba; they will go there."

"It was kind of Colonel Stuart to give us all our fortunes, and not take advantage of that shabby will," said Florence, jumping at another topic; "he has behaved really well, I must say; but I never

could have imagined you would be his wife. Where's that horrid old witch, Huldah, now?"

"Where she always is—at Torwood."

"I should think she would clear out of that before you go back. Oh, this is the place!"

They had stopped at the hospital, and, alighting, Edith led the way in. In the same place where Angus Torwood had turned so impatiently, Giacomo St. Leon was lying, propped up with pillows now—Giacomo St. Leon, but wasted to the shadow of what he had once been, his emaciated face disfigured by a long purplish scar, his large dark eyes, once so brilliant, sunken and dim.

He was reading when they entered, but the rustling of Florence's silk skirt meeting his ear, he turned round, and was face to face with his wife. That lady's first greeting was a suppressed shriek, at sight of his altered looks.

"Oh, my goodness! what a fright you have become! I declare you do look perfectly awful."

Poor St. Leon! In the glance he turned to Edith at the wifely greeting, she had all the revenge she need ever have desired. That hour was the hour of retribution for Giacomo St. Leon!

"It can't be helped now, Floy," he said, holding out his left hand; "better to lose one's arm and good looks than one's life. How have you been ever since?"

He need hardly have asked. Florence was in excellent condition, and a striking contrast to the living skeleton before her. As she sat on a chair by the bed Edith turned to go.

"I will leave you for half-an-hour," the latter said.

"I must return to the hotel then. I have an engagement."

Edith found the half-hour pass very swiftly and pleasantly among the old friends, nurses, and patients—much more pleasantly than it had passed with the husband and wife, judging by the faces of both when she returned. Florence rose at her coming with a look of unmistakable relief.

"I'll be back to-morrow, Giacomo," she said, shaking out her robes. "It's a horrible place, but I suppose there's no help for it."

"And I may as well say good-by, Mr. St. Leon," said Edith, "as we leave for Torwoodtown to-morrow, and I shall not see you again."

"I have been telling him about your marriage," said Florence; "is it at Torwoodtown it comes off?"

"Yes," said Edith, coloring, and feeling very strange indeed, under the circumstances.

"You have my best wishes," was all St. Leon said, in a very subdued voice. "Colonel Stuart and yourself are worthy of each other. Farewell."

And so they parted—those two so much to each other once—nothing at all now. There were tears in Edith's eyes when they gained the street, but Mrs. St. Leon's were dry.

"I do say it is too bad," was her indignant cry, "to have one's husband made such a scarecrow of. I shall be ashamed to be seen with him—I know I shall! I only wish I had never been such a fool as to elope! What shall you be married in, Edith—white?"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WEDDING.

TORWOODTOWN was in a state of great excitement. The whole population had their countenances glued to their window-panes watching two carriages driving swiftly by in the direction of the Rev. Mr. Peterson's humble little church. That edifice was thronged, too, albeit it was Thursday, not Sunday morning, and Father Peterson, in stole and surplice, stood within the sanctuary, waiting like the rest. He had not long to wait. The carriages, stopping at the door, two military gentlemen, Colonel Stuart and Captain Torwood, alighted from one, and Madame Torwood, Miss Edith Torwood, and Miss Madge were helped out of the other, and the whole party sailed into the church.

Madame Torwood was as magnificent as moire antique, velvet crape, and plumed bonnet could make her, and swept up the aisle, in superb disdain of the crowd of starers around her. Edith was in white, filmy and floating, orange blossoms wreathing her black hair, and a costly bridal veil enveloping her from head to foot like a cloud of mist. Madge was in white, too, and might have been mistaken for another bride, only the orange wreath and wedding veil were absent, and she sailed along the aisle, nodding and smiling to those she knew,

and returning every stare with compound interest.
And

“ Before the altar now they stand,
The bridegroom and the bride,
And who shall paint what lovers feel
In this their hour of pride? ”

It was all over! They had gone into the sacristy and registered their names, bidden good-by to Father Peterson, for they were to leave Torwoodtown, were back again in their carriages on their way to the old homestead, and Edith was Edith Torwood no more, but Mrs. Colonel Paul Stuart.

The program was all arranged. The whole party left for Baltimore at noon; madam was to join Lucy there, and start for New York, *en route* for Liverpool. Edith, too, was to see Lucy before they parted, perhaps forever, and afterwards remain in the city until sundry additions and improvements, now going busily on at the Towers, should be completed. Madge, too, was to enter a school there, and Edith wished to remain near her.

Breakfast was waiting when they got back, and the Rev. Mr. McPherson was waiting too. They had not much time to linger over it, for twelve, the hour at which the steamer started, was drawing near, and Madge and Edith had to change their attire. The snowy bridal robes were doffed for plain dark traveling dresses, the servants gathered in the entrance hall to bid them farewell, and the wedding party descended to the courtyard.

As they reached the gate, a figure crouching there started up, glanced on them menacingly for

an instant, then darted into the shrubbery, and disappeared.

"It's Huldah, poor soul!" exclaimed Edith, turning pale, and clinging closer to her husband's arm; "they tell me she is growing more and more insane every day."

"She shall be looked after," said Colonel Stuart. "Will you drive with us to the boat, Mr. McPherson?"

"I haven't time; I may as well say good-by now as then."

So good-by was said once more.

With a very solemn face, Madge leaned out of the carriage, where she sat with Angus and Madam Torwood.

"You may as well make your good-by to me final, Mr. McPherson," Madge said, "for you'll never see me again in this world; and very likely there'll be a gulf between us in the next."

"Why, do you mean to go——?" Mr. McPherson pointed downward.

"No; and for that very reason I'm afraid we are not destined to enjoy each other's society. If you hear I have become a nun one of these days, you need not be surprised."

"Nothing Miss Madge Torwood can do will surprise me; but I don't believe you will be a nun. Good-by."

"Neither do I," said Angus, as they drove away. "A year in a convent will take the nonsense out of you, make you a civilized being, and a fit wife for Captain Angus Torwood. There! don't fire up,



now ; behave yourself for once, and take a last view of your old home."

"Good-by to Torwood Towers," Midge said, standing up to wave her handkerchief.

Another moment and they were out of sight, and off on their journey.

THE END.

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